

THE
CORNHILL MAGAZINE.

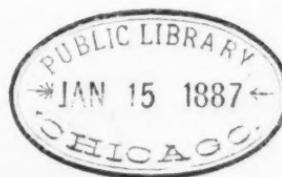
NEW SERIES, VOL. VI.



THE
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MAGAZINE

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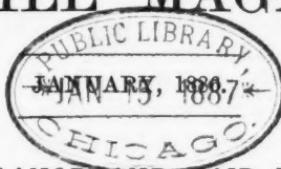
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THE
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QUEEN ELEANOR AND FAIR ROSAMOND.

BY MRS. OLIPHANT.

CHAPTER I.

THE FAMILY.

MR. AND MRS. LYCETT-LANDON were two middle-aged people in the fulness of life and prosperity. Though they belonged to the world of commerce, they were both well-born and well connected, which was not so common, perhaps, thirty years ago as it is now. He was the son of an Irish baronet; she was the daughter of a Scotch laird. He had never, perhaps, been the dashing young man suggested by his parentage, though he rode better than a business man has any call to ride, and had liked in moderation all his life the pleasures which business men generally can only afford themselves when they have grown very rich. Mr. Lycett-Landon was not very rich in the Liverpool sense of the word, and he had never been very poor. He had accepted his destination in the counting-house of a distant relation, who was the first to connect the name of Landon with business, without any heart-break or abandonment of brighter dreams. It had seemed to him from the beginning a sensible and becoming thing to do. The idea of becoming rich had afforded him a rational satisfaction. He had not envied his brothers their fox-hunting, their adventures in various parts of the world; their campaigning and colonising. Liverpool, indeed, was prosaic but very comfortable. He liked the comfort, the sensation of always having an easy balance at his bankers (bliss, indeed! and like every other kind of bliss, so out of reach to most of us), the everyday enjoyment of luxury and well-being, and was

indifferent to the prosaic side of the matter. His marriage was in every sense of the word a good marriage ; one which filled both families with satisfaction. She had money enough to help him in his business, and business connections in the West of Scotland (where the finest people have business connections), which helped him still more ; and she was a good woman, full of accomplishments and good-humour and intelligence. In those days, perhaps, ladies cultivated accomplishments more than they do now. They did not give themselves up to music or to art with absorbing devotion, becoming semi- or more than semi-professional, but rather with a general sense that to do lovely things was their vocation in the world, pursued the graces tenderly all round, becoming perhaps excellent in some special branch because it was more congenial than the others, but no more. Thus while Mrs. Lycett-Landon was far from equal to Mozart and Beethoven, and would have looked on Bach with alarm, and Brahms with consternation, in dance music, which her children demanded incessantly, she had no superior. The young people preferred her to any band. Her time was perfect, her spirit and fire contagious—nothing under five-and-twenty could keep still when she played, and not many above. And she was an admirable mistress of a house, which is the first of all the fine arts for a woman. What she might have been as a poor man's wife, with small means to make the best of, it is unnecessary to inquire, for this was fortunately not her rôle in life. With plenty of money and of servants, and a pretty house and everything that was necessary to keep it up, she was the most excellent manager in the world. Perhaps now and then she was a trifle hard upon other women who were not so well off as she, and saw the defects in their management, and believed that in their place she would have done better. But this is a fault that the most angelic might fall into, and which only becomes more natural and urgent the more benevolent the critic is, till sometimes she can scarcely keep her hands from meddling, so anxious is she to set the other right. It was to Mrs. Lycett-Landon's credit, as it is to that of many like her, that she never meddled ; though while she was silent, her heart burned to think how much better she would have done it. Her husband was somewhat of the same way of thinking in respect to men in business who did not get on. He said, 'Now, if So-and-so would only see——,' while his wife in her heart would so fain have taken the house out of the limp hands of Mrs. So-and-so and set everything right. It is a triumph

of civilisation, and at the same time a great trial to benevolent and clear-sighted people, that according to the usages of society the So-and-so's must always be left to muddle along in their own way.

Lycett, Landon, Fareham and Co. (Mr. Lycett-Landon combined the names and succession of two former partners) had houses in Liverpool, Glasgow, and London, and a large business. I think they were cotton-brokers, without having any very clear idea what that means. But this will probably be quite unimportant to the reader. The Lycett-Landons had begun by living in one of the best parts of Liverpool, which in those days had not extended into luxurious suburbs as now, or at least had done so in a very much less degree; and when the children came, and it was thought expedient to live in the country, they established themselves on the other side of the Mersey, in a great house surrounded by handsome gardens and grounds overlooking the great river, which, slave of commerce as it is and was, was then a very noble sight, as no doubt it continues to be. To look out upon it in the darkening, or after night had fallen, to the line of lights opposite, when the darkness hid everything that was unlovely in the composition of the great town and its fringe of docks, and to watch the great ships lying in midstream with lights at their masts and bows, and the small sprites of attendant steamboats, each carrying its little lamp, as they rustled to and fro, threading their way among the anchored giants, crossing and recrossing at a dozen different points, was an endless pleasure. I do not speak of the morning, of the sunshine, shining tranquil upon the majestic stream, flashing back from its miles of waters, glowing on the white spars and sails, the marvellous aerial cordage, the great ships resting from their labours, each one of them a picture, because that is a more common sight. But there are, or were, few things so grand, so varied, so full of interest and amusement as the Mersey at night. There were times, indeed, when it was very cold, and rarer times when it was actually dangerous to cross the ferry; when the world was lost in a white fog, and a collision was possible at every moment. But these exciting occasions were few, and in ordinary cases the Lycett-Landons, great and small, thought the crossing a pleasant adjunct both to the business and pleasure which took them to vulgar Liverpool. Vulgar was the name they were fond of applying to it with that sense of superiority which is almost inevitable in the circumstances, in people conscious of living out of it, and of making

of it a point of view, a feature in the landscape. But yet there was a certain affection mingled with this contempt. They rather liked to talk of the innumerable masts, the miles of docks, and when their visitors fell into enthusiasm with the scene, felt both pleasure and pride as in an excellence which they had themselves some credit from : 'A poor thing, sir, but mine own : ' and they felt a little scorn of those who did not see how fine the Mersey was with its many ships, although they affected to despise it in their own persons. These were the affectations of the young. Mr. Lycett-Landon himself had a solid satisfaction in Liverpool. He put all objections down at once with statistics and an intimation that people who did not respect the second seaport in the kingdom were themselves but little worthy of respect. His wife, however, was like the young people, and patronised the town.

At the time when the following incidents began to happen the family consisted of six children. These happy people had not been without their griefs, and there was more than one gap in the family. Horace was not the eldest, nor was little Julian the youngest of the children. But these times of grief had passed over, as they do, though no one can believe it, and scarcely disturbed the general history of happiness looking back upon it, though they added many experiences, made sad thoughts familiar, and gave to the mother at least a sanctuary of sorrow to which she retired often in the bustle of life, and was more strengthened than saddened, though she herself scarcely knew this. Horace was twenty, and his sister Millicent eighteen, the others descending by degrees to the age of six. There was a great deal of education going on in the family, into which Mrs. Lycett-Landon threw herself with fervour, only regretting that she had not time to get up classics with the boys, and with great enthusiasm throwing herself into the music, the reading, all the forms of culture with which she had already a certain acquaintance. These pursuits filled up the days which had already seemed very fully occupied, and there were moments when papa, coming home after his business, declared that he felt himself quite 'out of it,' and lingered in the dining-room after dinner and dozed instead of coming upstairs. But there is nothing more common than that a man of fifty, a comfortable merchant, after a very comfortable dinner, should take a little nap over his wine, and nobody thought anything of it. Horace was destined for business, to take up the inheritance of his father, which was far too considerable to be let fall into other hands ; and

though the young man had his dreams like most young men, and now and then had gratified himself with the notion that he was making a sacrifice, for the sake of his family, of his highest aspirations, yet in reality he was by no means dissatisfied with his destination, and contemplated the likelihood of becoming a very rich man, and raising the firm into the highest regions of commercial enterprise with pleasure and a sense of power which is always agreeable. Naturally, he thought that his father and old Fareham were a great deal too cautious, and did not make half enough of their opportunities; and that when 'new blood,' meaning himself, came in, the greatness and the rank of merchant princes, to which they had never attained, would await the house. He had been a little shy at first to talk of this, feeling that ambition of a commercial kind was not heroic, and that his mother and Milly would be apt to gibe. But what ambition of an aspiring youth was ever gibed at by mother and sister? They found it a great and noble ambition when they discovered it. Milly's cheeks glowed and her eyes shone with the thought. She talked of old Venice, whose merchants were indeed princes, generals, and statesmen, all in one. There are a great many fine things ready existing to be said on this subject, and she made the fullest use of them. The father was rich and prosperous, and able to indulge in any luxury; but Horace should be great. A great merchant is as great as any other winner of heroic successes. Thus the young man was encouraged in his aspirations. Mr. Lycett-Landon did not quite take the same view. 'He'll do very well if he keeps up to what has been done before him,' he said. 'Don't put nonsense into his head. Yes; all that flummery about merchant princes and so forth is nonsense. If he goes to London with that idea in his head, there's no telling what mischief he may do.'

'My dear,' said Mrs. Lycett-Landon, 'it must always be well to have a high aim.'

'A high fiddlestick!' said the father; 'if he does as well as I have done, he'll do very well.' And this sentiment was, perhaps, natural, too; for though there are indeed parents who rejoice in seeing their sons surpass them, there are many on the other side who, feeling their own work extremely meritorious, entertain natural sentiments of derision for the brags of the inexperienced boy who is going to do so much better. 'Wait till he is as old as I am,' Mr. Lycett-Landon said.

'So long as he is not swept away into society,' said the mother.

'Of course, when he is known to be in town, he will be taken a great deal of notice of, and asked out—'

'Oh, to Windsor Castle, I daresay,' said papa, and laughed. He was in one of his offensive moods, Milly said. It was very seldom he was offensive, but there are moments when a man must be so, against the united forces of youth and maternal sympathy with youth, in self-defence. Unless he means to let them have it all their own way he must be disagreeable from time to time. Mr. Lycett-Landon asserted himself very seldom, but still he had to do it now and then; and though there was nothing in the world (except Milly) that he was more proud of than Horace, called him a young puppy, and wanted to know what anybody saw in him that he was to do so much better than his father. But the ladies, though they resented it for the moment, knew that there was not very much in this.

It was to the London house that Horace was destined. He was to spend a year in it 'looking about him,' picking up an acquaintance with the London variety of mercantile life, learning all the minutiae of business, and so forth. At present it was under the charge of a distant relative of Mr. Fareham's, who, as soon as Horace should be able to go alone in the paths of duty, was destined to a very important post in the American house, which at present was small, but which Fareham's cousin was to make a great deal of. In the meantime, Mr. Lycett-Landon himself paid frequent visits to town to see that all was going well, and would sometimes stay there for a fortnight, or even three weeks, much jested at by his wife and daughter when he returned.

'Papa finds he can do a great deal of business at the club,' said Milly; 'he meets so many people, you know. The London cotton-brokers go to all the theatres, and to the Row in the morning. It is so much nicer than at Liverpool.'

'You monkey!' her father said with a laugh. He took it very good-humouredly for a long time. But a joke that is carried on too long gets disagreeable at the last, and after a while he became impatient. 'There, that's enough of it,' he would say, which at first was a little surprising, for Milly used, so far as papa was concerned, to have everything her own way.

CHAPTER II.

THE LONDON OFFICE.

'Again—so soon!'

This is what Mrs. Lycett-Landon and Milly said in chorus as the head of the house, with something which might have been a little embarrassment, announced a third visit to London in the course of four months. There was an absence of his usual assured tone—a sort of apologetic accent, which neither of them identified, but which both were vaguely conscious of, as expressing something new.

'Robert,' said his wife, 'you are anxious about young Fareham; I feel sure of it. Things are not going as you like.'

'Well, my dear, I didn't want to say anything about it, and you must not breathe a syllable of this to Fareham, who would be much distressed; but I am a little anxious about the young fellow. Discipline is very slack at the office. He goes and comes when he likes, not like a man of business. In short, I want to keep an eye upon him.'

'Oh, papa,' cried Milly, 'what a dear you are! and I that have been making fun of you about the club and the Row!'

'Never mind, my dear,' said her father magnanimously; 'your fun doesn't hurt. But now that you have surprised my little secret, you must take care of it. Not a word, not a hint, not so much as a look, to any of the Farehams. I would not have it known for the world. But, of course, we must not expose Horace to the risk of acquiring unbusiness-like habits.'

'Oh, and most likely fast ways,' cried Mrs. Lycett-Landon, 'for they seldom stop at unbusiness-like habits.' She had grown a little pale with fright. 'Oh, not for the world, Robert—our boy, who has never given us a moment's anxiety. I would rather go to London myself, or to the end of the world.'

'Fortunately, that's not necessary,' he said with a smile, 'and you must not jump at the worst, as women are so fond of doing. I have no reason to suppose he is fast, only a little disorderly, and not exact as a business man should be—wants watching a little. For goodness sake, not a word to Fareham of all this. I would not for any consideration have him know.'

'Don't you think perhaps he might have a good influence? he has been so kind to his nephew.'

'That is just the very thing,' said Mr. Lycett-Landon. 'He has been very kind (young Fareham is not his nephew, by the way, only a distant cousin), and, naturally, he would take a tone of authority, or preach, or take the after-all-I've-done-for-you tone, which would never do. No, a little watching—just the sense that there is an eye on him. He has a great many good qualities,' said the head of the house with a little pomp of manner; 'and I think—I really think—with a little care, that we'll pull him through.'

'Papa, you are an old dear,' said Milly with enthusiasm. Perhaps he did not like the familiarity of the address, or the rush she made at him to give him a kiss. 'At least, he put her aside somewhat hastily.

'There, there,' he said, 'that will do. I have got a great many things to look after. Have my things packed, my dear, and send them over to Lime-street Station to meet me. You can put in some light clothes, in case the weather should change. One never knows what turn it may take at this time of the year.'

It was April, and the weather had been gloomy; it was quite likely it might change, as he said, though it was not so easy to tell what he could want with his grey suit in town. This, however, the ladies thought nothing of at the moment, being full of young Fareham and his sudden declension from the paths of duty. 'And he was always so steady and so well behaved,' cried Mrs. Lycett-Landon. She saw after her husband's packing, which was a habit she had retained from the old days, when they were not nearly so rich. 'He was always a model young man; that was why I was so pleased to think of him as a companion for Horace.'

'These model young men are just the ones that go wrong,' said Milly, with that air of wisdom which is so diverting to older intelligences. Her mother laughed.

'Of course your experience is great,' she said; 'but I don't think that I am of that opinion. If a boy is steady till he is five-and-twenty, he is not very likely to break out after. Perhaps your father's prejudice in favour of business habits—'

'Mamma! It was you who said a young man seldom stopped there.'

'Was it? Well, perhaps it was,' said Mrs. Lycett-Landon with a little confusion. 'I spoke without thought. One should

not be too hard on young men. They can't all be made in the same mould. Your father was always so exact, never missing the boat once: and he cannot bear people who miss the boat; so, I hope, perhaps it is not so bad as he thinks.'

'It would never do,' said Milly, still with that air of solemnity, 'to have Horace thrown in the way of anyone who is not quite good and right.'

At this her mother laughed, and said, 'I am afraid he must be put out of the world then, Milly. I hope he has principles of his own.'

Notwithstanding this sudden levity, Mrs. Lycett-Landon fully agreed—later in the day, when the portmanteau had gone to the Lime-street Station, and she and her daughter had followed it and seen papa off by the train—that it was very important Horace should make his beginning in business under a prudent and careful guide; and that if there was any irregularity in young Fareham, it was very good of papa to take so much pains to put it right. Horace, who went home with them, was but partially let into the secret, lest, perhaps, he might be less careful than they were, and let some hint drop in the office as to the object of his father's journey. The ladies questioned him covertly, as ladies have a way of doing. What did the office think of young Mr. Fareham in London? Was he liked? Was he thought to be a good man of business? What did Mr. Pearce say, who was the head clerk and a great authority?

'I say,' said Horace, 'why do you ask so many questions about Dick Fareham? Does he want to marry Milly? Well, it looks like it, for you never took such notice of him before.'

'To marry me!' said Milly, in a blaze of indignation. 'I hope he is not quite so idiotic as that.'

'He is not idiotic at all; he is a very nice fellow. You will be very well off if you get anyone half as good.'

'I think,' said the mother, 'that papa and I will make all the necessary investigations when it comes to marrying Milly. Now make haste, children, or we shall miss the first boat.'

It was an April evening, still light and bright, though the air was shrewish, and the wind had some east in it, blighting the gardens and keeping the earth grey, but doing much less harm to the water, which was all ruffled into edges of white. The ten minutes' crossing was not enough to make these white crests anything but pleasant, and the big ships lay serenely in midstream, owning

the force of the spring breeze by a universal strain at their anchors, but otherwise with a fine indifference to all its petty efforts. The little ferry steamboat coasted along their big sides with much rustle and commotion, churning up the innocent waves. It was quite a considerable little party of friends and neighbours who crossed habitually in this particular boat, for the Lycett-Landons lived a little way up the river—not in bustling Birkenhead. They were all so used to this going and coming, and to constant meetings during this little voyage, that it was like a perpetually recurring water-party—a moment of holiday after the work of the day. The ladies had been shopping, the men had all escaped from their offices; they had the very last piece of news, and carried with them the evening papers, the new *Punch*—everything that was new. If there was any little cloud upon the family after their parting with papa, it blew completely away in the fresh wind; but there was not, in reality, any cloud upon them, nor any cause for anxiety or trouble. Even the mother had no thought of anything of the kind, no anticipation that was not pleasant. Life had gone so well with her that, except when one of the children was ailing, she had no fear.

Mr. Lycett-Landon on this occasion was a long time in London. He did not return till nearly the end of May, and he came back in a very fretful, uncomfortable state of mind. He told his wife that he was more uneasy than ever; he did not blame young Fareham; he did not know whether it was he that was to be blamed; but things were going wrong somehow. ‘Perhaps it is only that he doesn’t know how to keep up discipline,’ he said, ‘and that the real fault is with the clerks. I begin to doubt if it’s safe to leave a lot of young fellows together. It will be far safer to keep Horace here under my own eye, and with old Fareham, who is exactitude itself. He will do a great deal better. I don’t think I shall send him to London.’

‘Of course, Robert, I should prefer to keep him at home,’ she said, ‘but I am afraid after all that has been said it will disappoint the boy.’

‘Oh! disappoint the boy! What does it matter about disappointing them at that age? They have plenty of time to work it out. It is at my time of life that disappointment tells.’

‘That is true, no doubt,’ said the mother, ‘but we are used to disappointment, and they are not.’

He turned upon her almost savagely. ‘ You ! What disappointments have you ever had ? ’ he cried, with such an air of contemptuous impatience as filled her with dismay.

‘ Oh Robert ! ’ She looked at him with eyes that filled with tears. ‘ Disappointment is too easy a word,’ she said.

‘ You mean the—the children. What a way you women have of raking up the departed at every turn. I don’t believe, in my view of the word, you ever had a disappointment in your life. You never desired anything very much and had it snatched from you just when you thought—’ he stopped suddenly. ‘ How odd,’ he said, with a strange laugh, ‘ that I should be discussing these sort of things with you ! ’

‘ What sort of things ? I can’t tell you how much you astonish me, Robert. Did you ever desire anything so very much and I not know ? ’

Then he turned away with a shrug of his shoulders. ‘ You are so matter of fact. You take everything *au pied de la lettre*,’ he said.

This conversation remained in Mrs. Lycett-Landon’s mind in spite of her efforts to represent to herself that it was only a way of speaking he had fallen into, and could mean nothing. How could it mean anything except business, or the good of the children, or some other perfectly legitimate desire ? But, yet, in none of these ways had he any disappointment to endure. The children were all well and vigorous, and, thank God, doing as well as heart could desire. Horace was as good a boy as ever was : and business was doing well. There was no failure so far as she was aware in any of her husband’s hopes. It must be an exaggerated way of speaking. He must have allowed the disorder in the London office to get on his nerves : and he had the pallid, restless look of a man in suspense. He could not keep quiet. He was impatient for his letters, and dissatisfied when he had got them. He was irritable with the children and even with herself, stopping her when she tried to consult him about anything. ‘ What is it ? ’ or ‘ About those brats again ? ’ he said peevishly. This was when she wanted his opinion about a governess for little Fanny and Julian.

‘ What between Milly’s balls and Fanny’s governess you drive me distracted. Can’t you settle these trifles yourself when you see how much occupied I am with more important things ? ’

‘ I never knew before that you thought anything more important than the children’s welfare,’ she said.

'If there was any real question of the children's welfare,' he answered, with more than equal sharpness.

It came almost to a quarrel between them. Mrs. Lycett-Landon could not keep her indignation to herself. 'Because the London office is not in good order!' she could not help saying to Milly.

'Oh! mamma, dear, something more than that must be bothering him,' the girl said, and cried.

'I fear that we shall have to leave our nice home and settle in London. It is like a monomania. I believe your father thinks of nothing else night and day.'

Mrs. Lycett-Landon said this as if it were something very terrible; but, perhaps, it was scarcely to be expected that Milly would take it in the same way. 'Settle in London!' she said; and a gleam of light came into her eyes. The father came into the room at the end of this consultation and heard these words.

'Who talks of settling in London?' he said.

'My dear Robert, it seems to me it must come to that; for if you are so uneasy about the office, and always thinking of it—'

'I suppose,' he said, 'it is part of your nature to take everything in that matter of fact way. I am annoyed about the London office; but rather than move you out of this house I would see the London office go to the dogs any day. I don't mind,' he added, with a little vehemence, 'the coming and going; but to break up this house, to transplant you to London, there is nothing in the world I would not sooner do.'

She was a little surprised by his earnestness. 'I am very glad you feel as I do on that point. We have all been so happy here. But I, for my part, would give up anything to make you more satisfied, my dear.'

'That is the last thing in the world to make me satisfied. Whatever happens, I don't want to sacrifice you,' he said, in a subdued tone.

'It would not be a sacrifice at all; what fun it would be; and then Horry need never leave us,' cried Milly. 'For my part, I should like it very much, papa.'

'Don't let us hear another word of such nonsense,' he said angrily; and his face was so dark and his tone so sharp that Miss Milly did not find another word to say.

CHAPTER III.

ALARMS.

IT was rather a relief to them all when the father went away again. They did not say so indeed in so many words, still keeping up the amiable domestic fiction that the house was not at all like itself when papa was away. But as a matter of fact there could be little doubt that the atmosphere was clear after he was gone. A certain sulphurous sense of something volcanic in the air, the alarm of a possible explosion, or at least of the heat and mutterings that precede storms, departed with him. He himself looked brighter when he went away. He was even gay as he waved his hand to them from the railway carriage, for they had gone very dutifully to see him off, as was the family custom. ‘Papa is quite delighted to get off to his beloved London,’ Milly said. ‘He feels that things go well when he is there,’ her mother replied, feeling a certain need to be explanatory. The household life was all the freer when he was gone. The young people had a great many engagements, and Mrs. Lycett-Landon was very pleasantly occupied with these and with her younger children, and with all the manifold affairs of a large and full house. As happens so often, though the fundamental laws were not infringed, there was yet a little enlarging, a little loosening of bonds when the head of the house was not there. Mamma never objected to be ‘put out’ for any summer pleasure that might arise. She did not mind changing the dinner-hour, or even dispensing with dinner altogether, to suit a country expedition, a garden-party, or a pic-nic, which was a thing impossible when papa’s comfort was the first thing to be thought of. It was June, and life was full of such pleasures to the young people. Horace, indeed, would go dutifully to the office every morning, endeavouring to emulate the virtue of his father, and never miss the nine o’clock boat; though as this high effort cost him in most cases his breakfast, his mother was much perplexed on the subject, and not at all sure that such goodness did not cost more than it was worth. But he very often managed to be back for lunch, and the amusements for the afternoon were endless. Mr. Lycett-Landon wrote very cheerfully when he got back to London; he told his wife that he thought he saw his way to establishing matters on a much better footing,

and that, after all, Dick Fareham was not at all a bad fellow ; but he would not send Horace there for some time, till everything was in perfect order, and in the meantime felt that his own eye and supervision were indispensable. ‘I shall hope by next year to get everything into working order,’ he said. The family were quite satisfied by these explanations. There was nothing impassioned in their affection for their father, and Mrs. Lycett-Landon was happy with her children, and quite satisfied that her husband should do what he thought best. So long as he was well, and pleasing himself, she was not at all exacting. Marriage is a tie which is curiously elastic when youth is over and the reign of the sober everyday has come in. There is no such union, and yet there is no union that sits so lightly. People who are each other’s only confidants, and cannot live without each other, yet feel a half-relief and sense of emancipation when accidentally and temporarily they are free of each other. A woman says to her daughter, ‘We will do so-and-so and so-and-so when your father is away,’ meaning no abatement of loyalty or love, but yet an unconscious, unaccustomed, not unenjoyable freedom. And the man no doubt feels it perhaps more warmly on his side. So it was not felt that there was anything to be uncomfortable about or even to regret. The letters were not so frequent as the wife could have wished. She sent a detailed history of the family, and of everything that was going on every second day, but her husband’s replies were short, and there were much longer intervals between. Sometimes a week would elapse without any news ; but so much was going on at home, and all minds were so fully occupied, that no particular notice was taken. Mrs. Lycett-Landon asked, ‘How is it that you are so lazy about writing ?’ and there was an end of it. So long as he was perfectly well, as he said he was, what other danger could there be to fear ?’

There are times when the smallest matter awakens family anxiety, and there are other times when people are unaccountably, inconceivably easy in their minds, and will not take alarm whatever indications of peril may arise. When real calamity is impending how often is this the case ! Ears that are usually on the alert are deafened ; eyes that look out the most eagerly, lose their power of vision. Little Julian had a whitlow on his finger, and his mother was quite unhappy about it ; but as for her husband, she was at rest and feared nothing. When he wrote, after a long silence, that he felt one of his colds coming on and was going to nurse

himself, then indeed she felt a momentary uneasiness. But his colds were never of a dangerous kind ; they were colds that yielded at once to treatment. She wrote immediately, and bade him be sure and stay indoors for a day or two, and sent him Dr. Moller's prescription, which always did him good. 'If you want me, of course you know I will come directly,' she wrote. To this letter he replied much more quickly than usual, begging her on no account to disturb herself, as he was getting rapidly well again. But after this there was a longer pause in the correspondence than had ever happened before.

On one of these evenings she met her husband's partner, old Fareham, as he was always called, at dinner, at a large sumptuous Liverpool party. There was to be a great ball that evening, and Mrs. Lycett-Landon and her two eldest children had come 'across' for the two entertainments, and were to stay all night. The luxury of the food and the splendour of the accompaniments I may leave to the imagination. It was such a dinner as is rarely to be seen out of commercial circles. The table groaned, not under good cheer, as used to be the case, but under silver of the highest workmanship, and the most costly flowers. The flowers alone cost as much as would have fed a street full of poor people, for they were not, I need scarcely say, common ones, things that any poor curate or even clerk might have on his table, but waxy and wealthy exotics, combinations of the chemist's skill with the gardener's, all the more difficult to be had in such profusion because the season was summer and the gardens full of Nature's easy production. Mr. Fareham nodded to his partner's wife, catching her eye with difficulty between the piles of flowers. 'Heard from London lately ?' he said across the table, and nodded again several times when she answered, 'Not for some days.' Old Fareham was usually a jocose old gentleman, less perfect in his manners than the other member of the firm, and of much lower origin, though perhaps more congenial to the atmosphere in which he lived ; but he was not at all jocose that evening. He had a cloud upon his face. When his genial host tried to rouse him to his usual 'form' (for what can be more disappointing than an amusing man who will not do anything to amuse ?) he would brighten up for a moment, and then relapse into dulness. As soon as he came into the drawing-room after dinner he made his way to his partner's wife.

'So you haven't been hearing regularly from London ?' he

said, taking up his post in front of her, and bending over her low chair.

'I didn't say that; I said not for a few days.'

'Neither have we,' said old Fareham, shaking his white head. 'Not at all regular. D'ye think he is quite well? He has been a deal in town this year.'

She could scarcely restrain a little indignation, thinking if old Fareham only knew the reason, and how it was to save his relative and set him right! But she answered in an easy tone, 'Yes, he has thought it expedient—for various reasons.' If he had the least idea of his nephew's irregularities, this, she thought, would make him wince.

But it did not. 'Oh, for various reasons?' he said, lifting his shaggy eyebrows. 'And did you think it expedient too?'

'You know I enter very little into business matters,' she replied with the calm she felt. 'Of course we all miss him very much when he is away from home: but I never have put myself in Robert's way.'

'You've been a very good wife to him,' said the old man with a slight shake of the head; 'an excellent wife; and you don't feel the least uneasy? Quite comfortable about his health, and all that sort of thing? I think I'd look him up if I were you.'

'Have you heard anything about his health? Is Robert ill, Mr. Fareham, and you are trying to break it to me?' she said, springing to her feet.

'No, no, nothing of the sort,' he said, putting his hand on her arm to make her reseat herself. 'Nothing of the sort; not a word! I know no more than you do—probably not half or quarter so much. No, no, my dear lady, not a word.'

'Then why should you frighten me so?' she said, sitting down again with a flutter at her heart, but a faint smile; 'you gave me a great fright. I thought you must have heard something that had been concealed from me.'

'Not at all, not at all,' said the old man. 'I'm very glad you're not uneasy. Still it is a bad practice when they get to stay so long from home. I'd look him up if I were you.'

'Do you know anything I don't know?' she said with a recurrence of her first fear.

'No, no!' he cried—'nothing, nothing, I know nothing; but I don't think Landon should be so long absent. That's all; I'd look him up if I were you.'

Mrs. Lyckett-Landon did not enjoy the ball that night. For some time indeed she hesitated about going. But Milly and Horace were much startled by this idea, and assailed her with questions—What had she heard? Was papa ill? Had anything happened? She was obliged to confess that nothing had happened, that she had heard nothing, but that old Fareham thought papa should not be so long away, and had asked if she were not uneasy about his health. What if he should be ill and concealing it from them? The children paled a little, then burst forth almost with laughter. Papa conceal it from them! he who always wanted so much taking care of when he was poorly. And why should he conceal it? This was quite unanswerable: for to be sure there was no reason in the world why he should not let his wife know, who would have gone to him at once, without an hour's delay. So they went to the ball, and spent the night in Liverpool, and next morning remembered nothing save that old Fareham was always disagreeable. ‘If he knew your father's real object in spending so much time in London!’ Mrs. Lyckett-Landon said. It was her husband's generous wish to keep this anxiety from the old man; and how little such generous motives are appreciated in this world. It was evening before they returned home—for of course with so large a family there is always shopping to do, and the ladies waited till Horace left the office. But when they reached the Elms, as their house was called, there was a letter waiting which was not comfortable. It was directed in a hand which they could scarcely identify as papa's; not from his club as usual, nor on the office paper—with no date but London. And this was what it said.

‘My dear, you must not be disappointed if I write only a few words. I have hurt my hand, which makes writing uncomfortable. It is not of the least importance, and you need not be uneasy: but accept the explanation if it should happen to be some days before you hear from me again. Love to the children.

‘Yours affectionately,
‘R. L. L.’

Mrs. Lyckett-Landon grew pale as she read this note. ‘I see it all,’ she said; ‘there has been an accident, and Mr. Fareham did not like to tell me of it. Horace, where is the book of the trains? I must go at once. Run, Milly, and put up a few things for me in my travelling bag.’



'What is it, mother? Hurt his hand? Oh, but that is not much,' Horace said.

'It is not much perhaps: but to be so careful lest I should be anxious is not papa's way. "If it should happen to be some days—" Why it is ten days since he wrote last. I am very anxious. Horry, my dear, don't talk to me, but go and see about the trains at once.'

'I know very well about the trains,' said Horace. 'There is one at ten, but then it arrives in the middle of the night. Stop at all events till to-morrow morning. I will telegraph.'

'I am going by that ten train,' his mother said.

'Which arrives between three and four in the morning!'

'Never mind, I can go to the Euston, where papa always goes. Perhaps I shall find him there. He has never said where he was living.'

'You may be sure,' said Horace, 'you will not find him at the Euston. No doubt he is in the old place in Jermyn Street. He only goes to the Euston when he is up for a day or two.'

'I shall find him easily enough,' Mrs. Lycett-Landon said.

And then a little bustle and commotion ensued. Dinner was had which nobody could eat, though they all said it was probably nothing, and that papa would laugh when he knew the disturbance his letter had made. At least the children said this, their mother making little reply. Milly thought he would be much surprised to see mamma arrive in the early morning. He would like it, Milly thought. Papa was always disposed to find his own ailments very important, and thought it natural to make a fuss about them. She wanted to accompany her mother, but consented, not without a sense of dignity, that it was more necessary she should stay at home to look after the children and the house. But Horace insisted that he must go; and though Mrs. Lycett-Landon had a strange disinclination to this which she herself could not understand, it seemed on the whole so right and natural, that she could not stand out against it. 'There is no occasion,' she said. 'I can look after myself quite well, and your father too.' But Horace refused to hear reason, and Milly inquired what was the good of having a grown-up son if you did not make any use of him? Their minds were so free, that they both tittered a little at this, the title of grown-up son being unfamiliar and half absurd in Milly's intention at least. She walked down with them to the boat in the soft summer night. The world was

all aglow with softened lights, the moon in the sky, the lamps on the opposite bank reflecting themselves in long lines in the still water, and every dim vessel in the roadway throwing up its little sea-star of colour. ‘I shouldn’t wonder,’ said Milly, ‘if it is a touch of the gout, like that he had last year, and no accident at all.’

‘So much the more need for good nursing,’ her mother said, as she stepped into the boat.

Milly walked back again with Charley, her next brother, who was fifteen. They went up to the summer-house among the trees and watched the boat as it went rustling, bustling through the groups of shipping in the river, and made little bets between themselves as to whether it would beat the Birkenhead boat, or if the Seacombe would get there first of all. There were not so many ferryboats as usual at this hour of the night, but one or two were returning both up and down the river which had been out with pleasure parties, with music sounding softly on the water. ‘It is only that horrid old fiddle if we were near it,’ said Milly, ‘but it sounds quite melodious here,’ for the soft night and the summer air, and the influence of the great water, made everything mellow. The doors and windows of the happy house were still all open. It was full of sleeping children and comfortable servants, and life and peace, though the master and the mistress were both away.

CHAPTER IV.

GOING TO LOOK HIM UP.

THEY reached London in the dawn of the morning, when the blue day was coming in over the housetops, before the ordinary stir of the waking world had begun. Of course, at that early hour it was impossible to do anything save to take refuge in the big hotel, and try to rest a little till it should be time for further proceedings. They found at once from the sleepy waiter who received them that Mr. Lycett-Landon was not there. He remembered the gentleman; but they hadn’t seen him not since last summer, the man said.

‘I told you so, mamma,’ said Horace; ‘he is in Jermyn Street, of course. If he had been anywhere else, he would have put the address.’

They drove together to Jermyn Street as soon as it was practicable, but he was not there; and the landlord of the house returned the same answer that the waiter at the Euston had done. Not since last summer, he said. He had been wondering in his own mind what had become of Mr. Lycett-Landon, and asking himself if the rooms or the cooking had not given satisfaction? It was a thing that had never happened to him with any of his gentlemen, but he had been wondering, he allowed, if there was anything—He would have been pleased to make any alteration had he but known. Mrs. Lycett-Landon and her son looked at each other somewhat blankly as they turned away from this door. She smiled and said, ‘It is rather funny that we should have to hunt your father in this way. One would think his movements would be well enough known. But I suppose it’s this horrid London.’ She was a little angry and hurt at the horrid London which takes no particular note even of a merchant of high standing. In Liverpool he could not have been lost sight of, and even here it was ridiculous, a thing scarcely to be put up with.

‘Oh, we’ll soon find him at the club,’ Horace said, and they drove there accordingly, more indignant than anxious. It was still early, and the club servants had scarcely taken the trouble to wake up as yet. Club porters are not fond of giving addresses, knowing how uncertain it is whether a gentleman may wish to be pursued to their last stronghold. The porter in the present instance hesitated much. He said Mr. Lycett-Landon had not been there for some time; that there was a heap of letters for him, which he took out of a pigeon-hole and turned over in his hands as he spoke, and among which Horace (with a jump of his heart) thought he could see some of his mother’s; but nothing had been said about forwarding them, and he really couldn’t take upon himself to say that he knew the address.

‘But I’m his son,’ said Horace.

The porter looked at him very knowingly. ‘That don’t make me none the wiser, sir,’ he said with great reason.

The youth went out to his mother somewhat aghast. ‘They don’t know anything of him here,’ he said; ‘they say he hasn’t been for long. There’s quite a pile of letters for him.’

‘Then we must go to the office,’ Mrs. Lycett-Landon said. ‘He must have been very busy, or—or something.’

That was an assertion which no one could dispute. When the cab drove off again she repeated the former speech with an angry

laugh. ‘It *is* ridiculous, Horace, that you and I should have to run about like this from pillar to post, as if papa could slip out of sight like a—like a—mere clerk.’ The mercantile world does not make much account of clerks, and she did not feel that she could find anything stronger to say.

‘Nobody would believe it,’ said Horace, ‘if we were to tell them; but in the City it will be different,’ he added gravely.

In Liverpool it must be allowed the City was not thought very much of. It had not the same prestige as the great mercantile town of the north. The merchant princes were considered to belong to the seaports, and the magnates of the City had an odour of city feasts and vulgarity about them; but in the present circumstances it had other attractions.

‘The name of Lycett-Landon can’t be unknown there,’ said the lad.

His mother was wounded even by this assertion. She drew herself up. ‘A Lycett-Landon has no right to be unknown anywhere,’ she said. ‘We don’t need to take our importance from any firm, I hope. But London is insufferable; nobody is anybody that comes from what they are pleased to call the country “here.”’

There was an indignant tone in Mrs. Lycett-Landon’s voice. But yet she too felt, though she would not acknowledge it, that for once the City would be the most congenial. They drove along through the crowded, noisy streets in a hansom, feeling, after all, a little more at home among people who were evidently going to business as the men did in their own town. The sight of a well-brushed, well-washed, gold-chained commercial magnate in a white waistcoat with a rose in his buttonhole did them good. And thus they arrived at ‘the office,’ that one home-like spot amid all the desert of unaccustomed streets.

‘Perhaps,’ the mother said, ‘we shall find him here, ready to laugh at us for this ridiculous expedition.’

‘Well, I hope not,’ said Horace, ‘for he will be angry. Papa doesn’t like to be looked after.’

This speech chilled Mrs. Lycett-Landon a little: for it was quite true, and for her part she was not a woman who liked to be found fault with on account of silly curiosity. As a matter of fact few women do. So that it was with a little check to their eagerness that they got out at the office door among all the press of people coming to their daily labour. Horace, though he had

been intended to work there, scarcely knew the place; and his mother, though she had driven down three or four times to pick up her husband on the occasions when they were in town together, was but little better acquainted with it. And the clerks did not at all recognise these very unlikely visitors. Ladies appeared very seldom at the office, and at this early hour never.

'Your father, of course, would not be here so early,' Mrs. Lycett-Landon said as they went upstairs; 'and I don't suppose young Mr. Fareham either is the sort of person—but we must ask for Mr. Fareham.'

Remembering all that her husband had said, she did not in the least expect to find that young representative of the house. How curious it was to wait until she had been inspected by the clerk, to be asked who she was, to be requested to take a seat, till it was known if Mr. Fareham was disengaged! An impulse which she could scarcely explain restrained her from giving her name, which would at once have gained her all the respect she could have desired: and for the first time in her life Mrs. Lycett-Landon realised what it must be to come as a poor petitioner to such a place. The clerks made their observations on her and her son behind their glass screen. They decided that she must want a place in the office for the young fellow, but that Fareham would soon give her her answer. These young men did not think much of the personal appearance of Horace, who was clearly from the country; a lanky youth whom it would be difficult to make anything of. Their consternation was extreme when young Mr. Fareham, coming out somewhat superciliously to see who wanted him, exclaimed suddenly, 'Mrs. Landon!' and went forward holding out his hands. 'If I had known it was you!' he said. 'I hope I have not kept you waiting. But some mistake must have been made, for I was not told your name.'

'It was no mistake,' she said, looking graciously at the young clerk, who stood by very nervous and abashed. 'I did not give my name. We shall not detain you a moment, we only want an address.'

While she spoke she had time to remark the perfectly correct and orthodox appearance of young Fareham, of whom it was almost impossible to believe that he had ever committed an irregularity of any description in the course of his life. He led the way into his room with all the respect which was due to the wife of the chief partner, and gave her a chair. 'My time is

entirely at your service,' he said; 'too glad to be able to be of any use.'

Mrs. Lycett-Landon sat down, and then there ensued a moment of such embarrassment as perhaps in all her life she had never known before. There was a certain surprise in the air with which he regarded her, and not the slightest appearance of any idea what she could possibly want him for at this time in the morning. And somehow this surprised unconsciousness on his part brought the most curious painful consciousness to her. She was silent; she looked at him with a kind of blank appeal. She half rose again to go away without putting her question. She seemed to be on the eve of a betrayal, of a family exposure. How foolish it was! She looked at Horace's easy-minded, tranquil countenance and took courage.

'Do you expect,' she said, 'Mr. Landon here to-day?' with a smile, yet a catch of her breath.

'Mr. Landon!' The astonishment of young Fareham was extreme. 'Is he in town? We have not seen him since May.'

'Horace,' said Mrs. Lycett-Landon, half rising from her chair and then falling back upon it. 'Horace, your father must be very ill. He must have had—some operation—he must have thought I would be over-anxious—'

She became very pale as she uttered these broken words, and looked as if she were going to faint; and Horace, too, stared with bewildered eyes. Young Fareham began to be alarmed. He saw that his quick response was altogether unexpected, and that there was evidently some mystery.

'Let me see,' he said, appearing to ponder, 'perhaps I am making a mistake. Yes, I am sure he was here in May, he had just come back from the Continent. Wasn't it so? Oh, then, I must have misunderstood him. I thought he said—— Now I remember, he certainly was here in town. Yes, came to tell me something about letters—what was it?'

'Perhaps where you were to send his letters,' Mrs. Landon said quickly. 'That is what we want to know.' While she was listening to him, her mind had been going through a great many questions, and she had brought herself summarily back to calm. If it should be serious illness, all her strength would be wanted. She must not waste her forces with foolish fainting or giving in, but husband them all.

Then there arose an inquiry in the office. One clerk after

another was called in to be questioned. One said Mr. Lycett-Landon's letters were all forwarded to the Liverpool house, or to the Elms, Rockferry, his private address; another that they were sent to the club; and it was not till some time had been lost that one of the youngest remembered an address to which he had once been sent, to a lodging where Mr. Landon was staying. He remembered all about it, for it was a pretty house, with a garden, very unlike Jermyn Street.

'It was just after Mr. Landon came back from abroad,' the youth said; and by degrees he remembered exactly where it was, and brought it written down, in a neat, clerkly hand, on an office envelope. It was a flowery address, a villa in a road, both of them fanciful with a cockney sentiment.

Mrs. Lycett-Landon took the paper from him with a smile of thanks; but she was so bewildered and confused that she rose up and went out of the office without even saying good-morning to young Fareham.

'Mamma, mamma,' cried Horace after her, 'you have never said—'

'Oh, don't trouble her,' said young Fareham, 'I can see she is anxious. You'll come back, won't you, and let me know if you've found him? But I hope there is some mistake.'

He did not say what kind of mistake he hoped for, nor did Horace say anything as he followed his mother. He, like Milly, thought it impossible that papa would have hidden himself thus to be ill. He was a little nervous of speaking to his mother when he saw how pale and preoccupied she looked.

'Shall I call a cab?' he said. 'Mother, do you really think there is so much to fear?'

'He has never been on the Continent,' was all his mother could say.

'No; that's true. They just have got that into their heads. It was no business of theirs where he went.'

'It is everybody's business where a man goes—a man like him. I think I know what it is, Horace. He has been fretful for some time, and restless; he must have been ill, and he has been going through an operation. Don't say anything; I feel sure of it. Perhaps there was danger in it, and he feared the fuss, and that I should be over anxious.'

'We always thought as children that papa liked to be made a fuss with,' said simple Horace.

'You thought so in the nursery, because you liked it yourselves. Yes, we had better have a cab. How full the streets are! one cannot hear oneself talking.'

Then she was silent a little till the hansom was called. It was a very noisy part of the City, where the traffic is continual, and it was very difficult to hear a woman's voice. She paused before she got into the cab.

'Now I think of it,' she said, 'you had better go and telegraph to Milly, for she will be anxious. Go back to the hotel and do it. Tell her that we have got to town all safe, and that you will send her word this evening how papa is.'

'But, mother, you are not going without me! and it will be better to telegraph after we know.'

'That is what I wish you to do, Horace. It might upset him. I think it a great deal better for me to go by myself. Just do what I tell you. Milly will want to know that we have arrived all right; and wait at the hotel till I send for you.'

'You had much better let me come with you, mother.'

The noise was so great that she only made a 'No' with her mouth, shaking her head as she got into the cab, and gave him the address to show the cabman. Then, before Horace had awakened from his surprise, she was gone, and he was left, feeling very solitary, pushed about by all the passers-by upon the pavement. The youth was half angry, half astonished. To go back to the hotel was not a thing that tempted him, but he was so young that he obeyed by instinct, meaning to pour forth his indignation to Milly. Even in a telegram there is a possibility of easing one's heart.

CHAPTER V.

THE HOUSE WITH THE FLOWERY NAME.

MRS. LYCETT-LANDON drove off through the crowded City streets in a curious trace of excited feeling. She had a sense that something was going to happen to her; but how this was she could not have told. Nor could she have told why it was she had sent Horace away. Perhaps his father might not wish to see him, perhaps he might prefer to explain to her alone the cause of his absence. She felt the need of first seeing her husband alone, though she could not tell why. It was a very long drive. Out

of the bustling City streets she came to streets more showy, less encumbered, though perhaps scarcely less crowded, and then to some which showed the lateness of the season by shut-up houses and diminished movement, and then to line after line of those dingy streets, all exactly like each other, which form the bulk of London. There are so many of them, and they are so indistinguishable. She looked out of the hansom and noted them all as she drove on—but yet as if she noted them not, as if it were they that glided by her, as in a dream. Then she reached the suburbs, the roads with the flowery names, houses buried in gardens, with trees appearing behind the high enclosing walls. This perhaps was the strangest of all. She could not think what he could want here, so far out of the world, until she recalled to herself the idea of an illness and an operation which had already faded out of her mind—for that, like every other explanation, was so strange, so much unlike all his habits. Her heart began to beat as the cab turned into the street, going slowly along to look for the special house, and she found herself on the point of arriving at her destination. Though she was so anxious to find her husband, she would now, if she could, have deferred the arrival, have called out to the driver that it was not here, and bidden him go on and on. But there could not be any mistake about it—there was the name of the house painted on the gate. It was a little gate in a wall, affording a glimpse of a pretty little garden shaded with trees inside. She would not let the cabman ring the bell, but got out first and paid him, and then, when she could not find any further excuse, rang it—so faintly at first that no sound followed. She waited, though she knew she could not have been heard, to leave time for an answer. Looking in under the little arch of roses to the smooth bit of lawn, the flowers in the borders, she said to herself that there was not very much taste displayed in the flowers—red geraniums and mignonette, the things that everybody had, and great yellow nasturtiums clustering behind—not very much taste or individuality, but yet a great deal of brightness, and the look as of a home; not lodgings, but a place where people lived. There were some garden-chairs about, and on a rustic table something that looked like a woman's work. How natural it all seemed, how peaceable! It was curious that he should be living in such a place. Perhaps, she said to herself, it was the house of some clerk of the better sort—some one who had known him in his early years, and had wished to be kind: and in good air, and out

of the noise of the streets. She made all these explanations as she stood at the door waiting for some one to answer a ring which she knew very well could not have been heard—unable to understand her own strange pause, and the manner in which she dallied with her anxiety. But this could not last for ever. After she had waited more than the needful time she rang again, and presently the door was opened by an unseen spring, and she went in within the pretty enclosure. How pretty it was—only red geraniums and nasturtiums, it was true, but the soft odour of the mignonette, and the sunshine, and the silence—all so peaceful and so calm. There came over her a certain awe as she stepped across the threshold and closed behind her the garden-door. The windows were all open, the house-door open. Under the trees on the little lawn were two basket chairs, and a white heap of muslin, which some woman must have been working at, on the table. Mrs. Lycett-Landon felt like an intruder in this peaceful place. She said to herself at last that there must be some mistake, that it could not be here.

A housemaid, wiping her arms on her apron, came to the house-door—a round-faced, ruddy, wholesome young woman, just the sort of servant for such a place. No doubt there were two, cook and housemaid, the visitor said to herself, just enough for needful service. The young woman was smiling and pleasant, no forbidding guardian. She did not advance to meet the stranger, but stood waiting, holding her own place in the doorway. Her honest, open face confirmed the expression of peace and comfort that was about the house. The intruder came up softly, not able to divest herself of that sense of awe.

'Does Mr. Lycett-Landon live here?' she said, almost under her breath.

'Yes, ma'am, but he's rather poorly this morning,' the housemaid said.

'He is at home then? Will you take me to him, please—'

'Oh, I don't think I can do that, ma'am. He's rather poorly; he's keeping his room. The doctor don't think that it's anything serious, but as master is not quite a young gentleman he says it's best to be on the safe side.'

'Is Mr. Lycett-Landon your master?'

'Yes, ma'am,' with a little curtsey.

'Has he been ill long?'

'Oh, bless you, not at all. He has his 'ealth as well as could

be wished; only a little bilious or that now and then, as gentlemen will be. They ain't so careful in what they eat and drink as ladies—that's what I always say.'

'He is only bilious then—not ill? not long ill? there has been no—operation?'

'Oh, bless you, nothing of the sort!' the young woman said with the most evident astonishment.

Mrs. Lycett-Landon put all these questions in a kind of dream. Something kept her from saying who she was. She felt a curious anxiety to find out all the details before she announced herself.

'I think he will see me,' she said, a little faintly. 'I have come a long way to see him. Take me to him, please.'

'Is it business, ma'am?' said the girl.

'Business? yes; you may say it is business. I am his —. Take me to him at once, please.'

'Oh dear, I can't do that. I ask your pardon, but the last thing the doctor said was that he mustn't be troubled with no business.'

'But I must see him,' Mrs. Lycett-Landon said.

'You can't, ma'am, not to-day—it's not possible. To be sure,' the girl added with a pleasant smile, 'if Mrs. Landon would do as well.'

'Mrs. —, whom —?'

'Mrs. Landon—Mrs. Lycett-Landon, that's her full name. Oh, didn't you know as he was married? She'll be down in a moment if you'll step inside.'

The woman outside the door felt herself turned to stone. She said faintly, 'Yes, I think I will step inside.'

'Do, ma'am: you don't look at all well; you've been standing in the sun. Missis will be fine and angry if she knows as I let you stand like that. Take a chair, ma'am, please. She'll be here in a moment,' the cheerful maid-servant said.

She did not ask for the visitor's name—she was evidently not accustomed to visits of ceremony—but went upstairs quickly, with her solid foot sounding on every step.

The visitor for her part sat down, not feeling able to keep upon her feet, and faintly looked round her, seeing everything, understanding nothing. What did it all mean? The room was furnished like that of a newly-married pair. Little decorations were about, newly-bound books, a new little desk all ormolu and velvet; albums, photograph-frames, trifles from Switzerland, carved and

painted, like relics of a recent journey. Nothing was in absolute bad taste, but the fashion of the furnishing was not of the larger kind, which means wealth. It was slightly pretty, perhaps a little tawdry, yet not sufficiently worn to acquire that look as yet. Mingled with all this decoration, however, there was something else which had a curious effect upon the intruder, something that reminded her of her husband's library at home, a chair of the form he liked, a solid table or two, strangely out of place amid the little low sofas and *étagères*. She saw all this, and took it into her mind at a glance, without making any of these observations upon it. She made no observations. She was unable even to think; the maid's words went through her head without any will of hers—' Didn't you know as he was married?' 'If Mrs. Landon would do as well.' Mrs. Landon! Who was this that bore her own name—who was the man upstairs? She was not in any hurry to be enlightened. She seemed to herself rather grateful for the pause; glad to hold off any discovery that there might be to make with both hands, to keep it at arm's length. She sat quite still in this strange room, not thinking or able to think, wondering what was about to happen—what strange thing was coming to her.

At last she heard a footstep, a light step very different from the maid's, coming downstairs. She rose up instinctively and took hold of the back of a chair to support herself. The door opened, and a young woman, pretty, timid, tall, in a white flowing gown, with a little cap upon her dark hair, and a pair of appealing eyes, came in. She had an uncertain look, as if not wholly accustomed to her position. She said with a pretty blush and shyness, 'They tell me that you want to see my husband on business—but he is not well enough for business. Is it anything that I could do?'

'Will you tell me who you are?'

The new comer looked a little surprised at the voice, which was hoarse and unnatural, of her visitor. She answered with a little dignity, drawing up her slight young figure. 'I am Mrs. Lycett-Landon,' she said.

(*To be continued.*)

A NOVELIST'S FAVOURITE THEME.

IT has been said by Wendell Holmes that every man has in him one good novel, if he could but manage to write it. Most men leave their novel carefully unwritten. It has not yet been noticed, we think, that even those novelists whose variety of conception strikes us as their most remarkable quality have usually had one favourite idea, which reappears again and again, even in the texture of works otherwise most varied in structure.

For example, even Sir Walter Scott has his favourite theme, which sometimes is the chief feature of the story, at other times occupies quite a subordinate position, but is nearly always present in one form or another. Scott's favourite idea, brought in so often that but for his marvellous skill in clothing it in ever-varying garb it would have become wearisome, is to present the youthful hero of his plot as a young and inexperienced man, treated by the older characters as little more than a boy, often their unconscious agent in important political plots, occasionally looked down upon by the heroine herself (who knows more of such plans and takes a more leading part in carrying them out than the hero of the story), but showing himself worthier, or at least manlier, than his elders had imagined him to be. Scott has not always, perhaps, contented us with his hero; often another character is more interesting, as Fergus than Waverley, Bois Guilbert than Ivanhoe, Evandale than Morton; possibly because all Scott's heroes show the peculiarity we have described. In Edward Waverley we have the original of the type. In 'Guy Mannering' Harry Bertram never shakes off the manner of a very young man, whether with Meg Merrilies, the Dominie, Mr. Pleydell, or Colonel Mannering. Frank Osbaldistone, in 'Rob Roy,' treated by his father as a mere boy, is afterwards a mere tool in the hands of older men. Even Die Vernon treats him till near the end as but an inexperienced lad. Lovell, in 'The Antiquary,' plays a similar part, alike with Monk barns, with the Baronet, and with old Edie Ochiltree, and remains to the end unconscious of his real position, in regard both to his putative father and to Earl Geraldine. In 'Redgauntlet'—the plot of

which, by the way, is not very interesting—we have a hero similarly situated, and unconsciously taking part in a dangerous political plot. The hero of ‘The Black Dwarf’ is still more cavalierly treated, insomuch that no one, I imagine, takes the least interest in him. Young Arthur, in ‘Anne of Geierstein,’ is a puppet in his father’s hands to the end. The scenes between Quentin Durward and Louis XI. illustrate well Scott’s favourite theme. But Durward is also treated as a mere boy by Le Balafré, by Earl Crawford, and by Charles of Burgundy; we note, too, that he is entirely unconscious of the part he is really playing in the journey to Liège. Ivanhoe is under Cedric’s high displeasure till near the end of the story, and is as boyish a hero as Quentin Durward, despite the bravery they both show in the saddle. Henry Morton, with his uncle, with Dame Wilson, and afterwards with Balfour of Burley; Halbert Glendinning, with the monks; Julian Avenel, with Lady Avenel, and afterwards with Queen Mary and Catharine Seyton; Harry Gow (and Conachar) with Simon; Edgar Ravenswood with the elder Ashton and Caleb Balderstone; Tressilian, in ‘Kenilworth’; Monteith, in ‘The Legend of Montrose’; Merton, in ‘The Pirate’ (with old Mordaunt, with Norna of the Fitful Head, and even with Minna and Brenda) and their father, all these are samples of Sir Walter Scott’s favourite theme. It is the same with Damian, in ‘The Betrothed’; with the Varangian, in ‘Count Robert of Paris’; with young Nigel, in ‘The Fortunes of Nigel’; with Julian, in ‘Peveril of the Peak’; and with the Knight of the Leopard, in ‘The Talisman.’ Only one exception, and that rather apparent than real, can be mentioned—the ‘Heart of Midlothian,’ perhaps the finest of all Scott’s novels: but this is a novel without a hero, or, rather, Jeanie Deans is both hero and heroine (for Reuben Butler can scarcely be considered a hero). Now, strangely enough, Jeanie, thus taking a double part, womanlike in her patience and goodness, manlike in her endurance and courage, illustrates Scott’s pet theme (as obviously as Edward Waverley or Frank Osbaldestone) in the scenes with Staunton and Staunton’s father, with the Duke of Argyll and Queen Caroline—nay, even with Madge Wildfire.

Dickens, a writer of another type, had also his favourite theme. So far as I know, the point has not yet been noticed; but I think there can be no doubt that one special idea had more attraction for him than any other, and seemed to him the most effective leading idea for a plot.

The idea which more than any other had a fascination for Dickens, and was apparently regarded by him as likely to be most potent in its influence on others, was that of a wrong-doer watched at every turn by one of whom he has no suspicion, for whom he even entertains a feeling of contempt. This characteristic, although, as I have said, it has been generally overlooked, is so marked that, so soon as attention is directed to it, men wonder it had not been noticed at once.

Of course, in a story like '*Pickwick*', started originally as a comic sporting tale, and only worked into a more serious form after the death of the sporting artist who was to have illustrated it, we should not expect to find any trace of an idea which Dickens valued chiefly for its effect in exciting tragic emotions. We have only to consider how he worked this idea to see how unsuitable it would have been in such a novel as '*Pickwick*'—if, indeed, '*Pickwick*' can be called a novel.

But in two out of the first four novels which Dickens wrote we find this idea of patient watching—even to death or doom—a marked feature of the story. In '*Barnaby Rudge*' Haredale steadily waits and watches for Rudge, till, after more than twenty years, 'at last, at last,' as he cries, he captures his brother's murderer on the very spot where the murder had been committed. In this case, too, it is to be noticed that Rudge has been supposed to be dead during all the years of Haredale's watch; and this was so important a part of Dickens's conception that he makes Haredale speak of it, even in the fierce rush in which he seizes Rudge. 'Villain!' he says, 'dead and buried, as all men supposed, through your infernal arts, but reserved by heaven for this.' It became a favourite idea of Dickens to associate the thought of death either with the watcher or the watched; and, unless I mistake, in the final and finest development of his favourite theme, he made one 'dead and buried as all men supposed' watch the very man who supposed him dead, and not only buried but destroyed.

In '*Nicholas Nickleby*' it is the untiring enmity of Brooker, not the work of those he chiefly dreads, which drives Ralph Nickleby to self-murder. 'Ralph had no reason,' we are told, 'that he knew, to fear this man; he had never feared him before;' but he trembles when Brooker comes forth from the darkness in which he had been concealed, and confronts him—to tell the story which is to be as the doom of death to him.

In the other two of these first four works—‘Oliver Twist’ and ‘The Old Curiosity Shop’—we find less marked use of Dickens’s favourite idea, though it is not wholly absent from either work. In ‘The Old Curiosity Shop,’ the two Brass scamps (to include that ‘old fellow,’ Miss Sally Brass, in the term) are watched by the despised Marchioness, and it is by her—their powerless victim, as they supposed—that their detection is brought about. ‘Oliver Twist’ was written specially to attack the workhouse system in England, and other ideas gave place to that leading one.

In Dickens’s next novel the idea is further developed. In passing, I note that naturally the idea could never be presented twice in the same precise form. It is indeed wonderful how many changes Dickens was able to ring on this general notion of an untiring watch kept on one not suspecting that he was watched, and least of all that he was watched by the man who was really holding his ways and doings constantly in view. In ‘Martin Chuzzlewit’ the two chief villains of the story, Jonas Chuzzlewit, the murderer (perhaps the most shadowy murderer ever pictured by novelist), and Pecksniff, the hypocrite, are both watched in the melodramatic way that Dickens loved. Jonas has no fear of Nadgett, and, indeed, never suspects that Tom Pinch’s silent landlord is watching him at all. All his thoughts are directed towards Montague Tigg. To see how Dickens delighted in the idea I am considering, we have only to notice the way in which he presents Jonas Chuzzlewit’s thoughts when Nadgett denounces him. ‘I never watched a man so close as I have watched him,’ says Nadgett; and the thoughts of the frightened murderer shape themselves thus: ‘Another of the phantom forms of this terrific truth! Another of the many shapes in which it started up about him out of vacancy! This man, of all men in the world, a spy upon him; this man, changing his identity, casting off his shrinking, purblind, unobservant character, and springing up into a watchful enemy! *The dead man might have come out of his grave and not confounded and appalled him so.*’ Later, Dickens meant to have made use of this supreme horror, a dead man watching his murderer; for note: Jonas thinks not of *some* dead man, but of the dead man whom he has murdered. We may observe also that Jonas Chuzzlewit, like the latest of Dickens’s villains, is but a murderer in intent, and in the supposed achievement of his purpose, at first; he commits an actual murder to escape punishment for a supposed murder, as Jasper, in killing

Neville Landless, was to be brought to death in trying to escape death ; probably, too, by self-slaughter, like Jonas.

While Jonas is watched by Nadgett, whom he despises ('Old What's-his-name,' he calls him, ' looking as usual as if he wanted to skulk up the chimney ; of all the precious dummies in appearance that ever I saw, he's about the worst ; he's afraid of me, I think '), Pecksniff is watched by one whom he regards as to all intents and purposes dead, who had lived in his house, 'weak and sinking,' but who suddenly shows that he has been keen and resolute, 'with watchful eye, vigorous hand on staff, and triumphal purpose in his figure.' 'I have lived in this house, Pinch,' says old Martin, 'and had him fawning on me days and weeks and months ; I have suffered him to treat me as his tool and instrument ; I have undergone ten thousand times as much as I could have endured if I had been the miserable old man he took me for. I have had his base soul bare before me day by day, and have not betrayed myself. I never could have undergone such torture but for looking forward to this time. The time now drawing on will make amends for all, and I wouldn't have him die or hang himself for millions of golden pieces.'

It is clear that the idea of patient watching to bring an evildoer to justice must have been strong in Dickens's mind when he thus worked it into the warp of his most characteristic plots, and into both warp and woof of the work which was perhaps most characteristic of them all. That the theme is melodramatic and utterly unlike anything in real life makes this all the clearer. Probably no man that ever lived has been willing to devote months or years of his life to such a task as Dickens thus imagined ; but so much the more obvious is it that the idea was specially his own.

In Dickens's next important work—'Dombey and Son'—we do not find this characteristic idea in so marked a form. Yet it is present, and in more ways than one. Thus we find Dombey watched by Carker (whom he regards as a mere business manager for his great house), all his ways noted, and the ruin of his house wrought, by the man whom he considers so little worth noticing. But Carker himself in turn is tracked by those whom he regards as utterly contemptible—old Mother Brown and her unhappy daughter. So again, in the pursuit of Carker by the man whom he has wronged and whom he despises, we have the same idea, though in a changed form. The pursuit reminds one of a hideous

dream, in which some enemy from whom we fly appears always at the moment when we imagine we have reached safety. 'In the fever of his mortification and rage,' we are told, 'panic mastered him completely. He would gladly have encountered almost any risk rather than meet *the man of whom*, two hours ago, *he had been utterly regardless*. His fierce arrival, which he had never expected, the sound of his voice, their having been so near meeting face to face—he would have braved out this; but the springing of his mine upon himself seemed to have rent and shivered all his hardihood and self-reliance.'

In 'David Copperfield,' which was in large degree autobiographical, we might have expected that the idea we are considering would not present itself. Yet here also it is seen, and more than once. The plots of Uriah Heep are defeated by the close watch kept on him by Micawber, whom Heep thoroughly despises. Littimer, the 'second villain' of the story, is brought to punishment, as one of his gaolers tells Copperfield, by the devotion of little Miss Mowcher, who, once on his track, follows him till he is in the toils, and finally aids in his capture.

In 'Bleak House' the interest of an important part of the story turns on a murder. Mystery is suggested, not so much by the question, 'Who is the murderer?' (about which no reader of average intelligence can have any doubt), but by doubts as to the way in which the murder has been committed and suspicion thrown on two innocent persons. Here, again, Dickens adopts his favourite idea. Mademoiselle Hortense spares no pains to bring the charge of murder on another, who is her enemy—a theme which Dickens was to have wrought out more fully in his latest work. In her anxiety to throw suspicion on Lady Dedlock she loses sight of her own danger. If she has any fears, she certainly has none of the woman with whom she lodged. Yet this is where her real danger lies. This woman keeps watch upon her night and day. This woman had undertaken ('speaking to me,' says her husband, Inspector Bucket, 'as well as she could on account of the sheet in her mouth') 'that the murderer should do nothing without her knowledge, should be her prisoner without suspecting it, should no more escape from her than from death.'

In 'Little Dorrit' we find Dickens's favourite theme in a new aspect. I think the importance of this part of the rather bewildering plot of 'Little Dorrit' obtained less recognition

than Dickens intended. The murderous Rigaud-Blandois, or Blandois-Rigaud (as best suits his convenience), disguises himself as a much older man with white hair—an idea which in a modified form was to reappear in Dickens's last novel. He is watched closely and patiently by the despised Cavaletto, the 'contraband beast,' as Blandois calls him. 'It is necessary,' says Cavaletto, telling the story, 'to have patience. I have patience . . . I wait *patientissamentally*. I watch, I hide, until he walks and smokes. He is a soldier with grey hair. But! . . . he is also this man that you see.' What Dickens felt (or supposed) to be the effects of the sudden discovery that a watch of this sort had been kept is shown by the way in which even Rigaud-Blandois (whose chief characteristic, outside his villainy, is his coolness) blanches when he hears how Cavaletto had watched him so *patientissamentally*. 'White to the lips'—yet when he knows that his story is known, he 'faces it out with a bare face, as the infamous wretch he was.'

The 'Tale of Two Cities,' of course, turns wholly on the general idea which we have thus found in more or less important parts of Dickens's chief works. It is the undying hate, handed on from generation to generation, of the despised French peasantry—a hate patiently waiting for vengeance, even on the innocent descendants of the feudal tyrants of old—which brings about the series of events leading to the catastrophe. Dickens himself called attention to this point. The objection was raised that the feudal cruelties did not come sufficiently within the date of the action to justify his use of them. 'I had, of course, full knowledge,' he replied, 'of the formal surrender of the feudal privileges; but he had also sufficient knowledge of human nature, he went on to say, to know that hatreds which had been growing during twenty generations would not die out, or even perceptibly diminish, in the first few generations after their cause was removed—nay, that even the direct effects of that evil cause would not quickly cease, and assuredly had not ceased when the French Revolution began.'

In 'Great Expectations' the whole plot turns on two watchings, by men whom the watched persons despise. First, Magwitch

¹ In the last chapter of the fourth volume of Alison's 'History of Europe' (I refer to the first edition of twenty-one volumes, the form in which I read that light and elegant little work as a boy) this is very fully pointed out—perhaps even somewhat too fully.

keeps watch (and kindly ward, too, despised though he is) on Pip, whose disgust and horror when he learns who has been his unknown benefactor must be regarded as undoubtedly illustrating Dickens's favourite theme. But also the despised and thoroughly despicable Compeyson keeps patient and finally successful watch on his enemy Magwitch. The interest of the story culminates in the close of this long watch, the death of the watcher, and the mortal injury of the watched. A minor part of the action shows the same characteristic idea in the watch kept by Orlick, first on Mrs. Gargery, till he strikes her a death-blow, and then long and patiently on Pip, till finally he succeeds in inveigling him to the lonely place by the marshes, where he had intended that not only should Pip be slain, but destroyed from off the face of the earth. (Another villain was to have planned a similar end for his victim in Dickens's latest story.)

Never surely had any leading idea been so thoroughly worked by a novelist as this pet theme of Dickens had been worked—and overworked, one would have said—in the stories I have dealt with. It would seem as though Dickens conceived that nothing could more impress and move his readers than the idea of patient, unsuspected watch kept by some one supposed either to be indifferent or insignificant or powerless or dead, that he thus used the idea in so many forms in his chief works up to the time when 'Great Expectations' had appeared. It might be imagined that now at last he could feel it to be no longer available. The thought may indeed present itself that as a man advances in years his first notions become more and more his leading themes: yet it would seem as though Dickens could not, without repeating himself, make further use of his favourite idea.

What, however, do we find? In his next novel, 'Our Mutual Friend,' Dickens takes 'as the leading incident for his story' (I quote his own words) 'the idea of a man, young and perhaps eccentric, feigning to be dead, and being dead to all intents and purposes external to himself.' He presents this man as keeping patient watch on more than one character, in this the most varied in colouring of all Dickens's novels. He shows him trying to recall the manner of his own death, in order that the reader may more fully recognise how thoroughly dead is this patiently watching man to all external to himself. 'I have no clue to the scene of my death,' he says; 'not that it matters now.' 'It is a sensation not experienced by many mortals,' he adds, 'to be looking

into a churchyard on a wild, windy night, and to feel that I no more hold a place among the living than these dead do, and even to know that I lie buried as they lie buried ; nothing uses me to it ; a spirit that was once a man could hardly feel stranger or lonelier, going unrecognised among men, than I feel.' In his latest story Dickens meant to have brought out still more prominently the idea of a man, supposed to be dead, thus looking into the place where, to all intents and purposes external to himself, he lay dead, buried, and destroyed.

Even this is not quite all, however. In 'No Thoroughfare' (in the part written by Dickens) we have a man described as dead—if it means anything to say that his 'heart stood still' (not momentarily, but during events that must have lasted many minutes)—coming to life, and confronting the man who supposed he had murdered him. The circumstances of this supposed murder are akin, by the way, in two striking circumstances, to the supposed murder which was the real mystery of Dickens's last story.

Again, in 'Hunted Down' we have a man whom the villain of the story supposes to be dying (as surely murdered by him as if he had slain him outright) turning out to be another man, disguised, who is not dying at all, but tracks Slinkton to his own death—by self-murder, as it was to have been with the villain of Dickens's last story, and as it had been with so many of his earlier villains. 'You shall know,' says Meltham, speaking as Beckwith, 'for I hope the knowledge will be terrible and bitter to you, why you have been pursued by one man, and why you have been tracked to death at a single individual's charge. That man, Meltham, was as absolutely certain that you could never elude him in this world, if he devoted himself to your destruction with the utmost fidelity and earnestness, and if he divided this sacred duty with no other duty in life, as he was certain that in achieving it he would be a poor instrument in the hand of Providence, and would do well before Heaven in striking you out from among living men. I am that man, and I thank God that I have done my work.'

Before passing to the last work of all, I may note here that Dickens himself noted among his 'subjects for stories' a form of the theme we have been considering. 'Here is a fancy,' Forster says, 'that I remember him to have been more than once bent upon using ; but the opportunity never came.' 'Two men to be

guarded against'—the words are Dickens's own now—‘one whom I openly hold in some serious animosity, whom I am at the pains to wound and defy, and whom I estimate as worth wounding and defying; the other, whom I treat as a sort of insect, and contemptuously and pleasantly flick aside with my glove. But it turns out to be the latter who is the really dangerous man; and when I expect the blow from the other—it comes from him.’ In a sort this idea was worked out in ‘The Mystery of Edwin Drood.’ Here a young man, who seemed light and wayward, has been swept aside and is supposed to be dead, as an insect might be crushed. Jasper has no further thought of him; but he plots serious measures against a man whom he holds in serious animosity, and whom he has been at the pains to wound and defy. But the fatal blow was to have come from the man who had seemed so wanting in purpose, the ‘bright boy’ of the opening scenes.

Every conceivable form of his favourite theme had now been tried, save that which Dickens had himself indicated as the most effective of all—that the dead should rise from the grave to confront his murderer. This idea was at length to be used, difficult though it seemed to work it out successfully. ‘I have a very curious and new idea for my new story,’ he wrote to Forster; ‘not a communicable idea (or the interest of the book would be gone), but a very strong one, though difficult to work.’ From what we know of Forster’s restless inquisitiveness in regard to Dickens’s plans, we learn without surprise that immediately after he had been told that the idea was not communicable he asked to have it communicated to him. Nor does it seem to have been regarded by Forster as at all strange that at once (his own words are ‘immediately afterwards’) Dickens communicated to him the idea which had been described as ‘incommunicable,’ or that the new and curious idea should be both stale and commonplace—nothing, in fact, but the oft-told tale of a murder detected by the presence of indestructible jewellery in lime into which the body of the murdered man had been flung. Forster’s vanity blinded him in such sort that the patent artifice was not detected. Yet he asked where the originality of the idea came in. Dickens explained, he naïvely adds, that it was to consist ‘in the review of the murderer’s career by himself at the close, when its temptations were to be dwelt upon as if not he, the culprit, but some other man, were the tempted.’ But of course, so far as this special

feature was concerned, the idea had been already worked out in the 'Madman's Manuscript' in 'Pickwick,' and in the 'Clock-case Confession' in 'Master Humphrey's Clock.'

The real idea underlying 'The Mystery of Edwin Drood' was a very striking and novel form of Dickens's favourite theme. But before showing this it may be well to make a few general remarks respecting this remarkable work.

The usual idea about 'The Mystery of Edwin Drood' has been that the novel was one of the dullest Dickens ever began. I remember hearing an eminent novelist say, in 1873, that, as part after part came out, he felt that 'Charles Dickens was gone, positively gone'—just as the great dramatic critic in 'Nicholas Nickleby' felt about the Shakespearian drama. Longfellow, however, thought differently, and I take him to have been far and away the better judge. He thought that 'The Mystery of Edwin Drood' promised to be the finest work Dickens had written. That opinion, expressed within a few weeks of Dickens's death, led me to read a story which I had determined to avoid, as incomplete, and likely therefore to be tantalising in the reading; and I have always felt grateful to the poet for thus sending me to read a work which, even though incomplete, is worth, to my mind, 'Nicholas Nickleby' and 'Martin Chuzzlewit' together.

I take it that 'The Mystery of Edwin Drood' is disliked chiefly because the idea presents itself to many readers that the plot really is formed on the commonplace and well-worn idea mentioned to Forster, and artfully suggested at every turn of the narrative. Longfellow, as a poet, felt the real meaning of the tones in which Dickens told that seemingly commonplace story, and heard beneath them voices telling a story full of pathos and tragic force. To the ordinary reader 'Edwin Drood' is merely the story of a murder, the murder of a wayward, careless young man. The very details of the murder seem clear. The reader knows, he thinks, how the murder is to be found out, whom the heroine and her friend are to marry, and how the murderer is to tell the story of his own crime as well as of his defeated attempt to bring about the death of the man he hates and fears.

In such a story there is little of interest; and the tone of the completed half of the book seems quite unsuited to the intrinsic insignificance of the narrative. Thus judged, 'Edwin Drood' promised to be as worthless as many considered it.

It was not of such a story, thus ill told, that Longfellow spoke

with such enthusiasm. The real story is more mysterious, more terrible ; it is at once more pathetic and more humorous.

How Dickens had proposed to explain in the *dénouement* the details of Jasper's attack on Edwin, and subsequent attempt to destroy the body of his supposed victim, we do not know. But that Edwin Drood has been in some way saved from death (through the agency of Durdles, probably, though Durdles himself, half drunk as usual at the time, knows little about it) is manifest to all who understand Dickens's ways. The very words by which he tries to convince us that Drood is dead show that Drood has not been killed. It is the 'bright boy' who is never to be seen again. Drood lives; and changed by a terrible shock from boyishness to manliness, Drood's carelessness towards Rosa is turned into earnest love. Moreover, Rosa knows that Drood is living, and is full of sorrow for him that she can give him but a sister's love. Rosa's sorrow for Edwin's hopeless love is so skilfully veiled in the later chapters of the story, that it is mistaken by most readers for sorrow because Edwin is dead. But every tone shows that it is sorrow for the living. Every tone, too, of all that Drood says, when his thoughts dwell on his new-born love for Rosa, shows that he feels that love to be hopeless.

All this must seem idle to those who imagine that Edwin is dead and therefore silent. The most careless reader, said Miss Meyrick in 'The Century,' can see that the idea that Edwin is alive is contradicted by Dickens himself in the story. Even so : Dickens so carefully contradicts this idea, that the careless reader, as Miss Meyrick shows, rejects it as out of the question. The careful reader forms another opinion, especially when he learns that Dickens had expressed his fear lest, with all his anxiety to keep his plot concealed, it had been disclosed for the keener-sighted.

We might never have heard of the fear thus expressed were it not that a few hours afterwards Dickens was dead. Miss Hogarth naturally mentioned all that Dickens had said to her during those last few days. Forster's words are these : 'Dickens had become,' he says, 'a little nervous about the course of the tale, from a fear that he might have plunged too soon into the incidents leading to the catastrophe, such as "the Datchery assumption" in the fifth number—a misgiving he had certainly expressed to his sister-in-law.' Observe the words, 'the Datchery assumption,' and consider how much they mean. The character

of the quaint, half-sad, half-humorous stranger is, then, an assumed one. That Datchery is disguised is of course obvious, even to Miss Meyrick's 'careless reader.' But the part *is* assumed, and the assumption is one which suggests the nature of the *dénouement*. This, in reality, is telling the whole secret. For, passing over, as 'too cruel silly,' the idea that the genial yet sad and sympathetic Datchery might be Bazzard, Grewgious's dull and self-conceited clerk, there is no one else in the story who *can* have assumed the part of Datchery, except the man whom the careless reader will be the last to think of—Edwin Drood himself.

But in reality it needs no keenness of sight, but only a good ear for tone and voice, to show that Drood and Datchery are one. I venture to say that Longfellow did not need to have any external evidence to show that this is so. I do not know if Dr. Holmes has read Dickens's half-told tale, but I am confident that if he has, *he* will not have doubted for an instant that the man who talks to Princess Puffer as Edwin Drood, just before Drood disappears, is the same man, with the same feelings at work in his heart (in particular, the same sense of all he has thrown away by his own waywardness) as he who later talks to her at the same place as Datchery, in the assumed character of Datchery, 'an idle buffer living on his means.' We know even, as the music of the words is heard, that, in some instinctive way, the old opium-eater feels this. But we feel still more strongly that the same thought saddens the man that saddened the boy—the thought of what Rosa has become to him now he has released her from a foolish tie—the thought how hopeless is his new-born love. The reader must be more than 'careless' who does not feel that the half sad, half humorous Datchery of this conversation is Drood, moved by anxiety about the dangerous duty he has determined to fulfil, and by doubts as to what will follow. Who but Edwin himself would be so moved by thoughts of the Edwin of old, so stirred by sadness at the thought of some sacrifice past, so wistful at the thought that 'the haven beyond the iron-bound coast might never be reached'? Dickens had indeed lost all his old power, his music had indeed become 'as sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh,' if the tender refrain heard so often in that last scene but one of the half-told story has no deeper meaning than the business meditations of a detective!

Those who love Dickens (with all his faults), but have not

cared to read his unfinished story, or, having read it, have failed to note the delicate clue running through it, may find in the knowledge that Drood is saved from death to be his own avenger, all that they need to make 'The Mystery of Edwin Drood,' incomplete though it is, one of the most interesting of Dickens's novels. All that we know of Dickens's favourite ideas, all that the story really tells us, all that is conveyed by the music of the descriptions, assures those who really understand Dickens that his favourite theme was to have been worked into this novel in striking and masterly fashion. Jasper was to have been tracked remorselessly to his death by the man whom he supposed he had slain. Risen from the grave, Drood was to have driven Jasper to his tomb. Nay, we know from the remarkable picture which appeared on the outside of the original monthly numbers (a picture,¹ be it remembered, which was designed before a line of the story was published), that Drood was to have forced Jasper to visit the very tomb where he thought that the dust of his victim lay—there to find, alive and implacable, the man whom he had doomed to a sudden and terrible death.

¹ In this picture we see Edwin standing in the tomb as Jasper enters it, doubtless to seek for the jewelled ring, of which he would be told by Grewgious, purposely that he might be driven to that dreadful search. Grewgious obviously knew of Edwin's escape from the tomb (witness the scene with Jasper, and Grewgious's subsequent seeming carelessness about the ring—which we know to have been most precious in his eyes). It has been objected that it would have been cruel for Edwin and Grewgious to let Neville Landless remain under suspicion—but Grewgious may very well have regarded this as a discipline much needed by Neville, and likely to be very beneficial in a young man of his fiery nature. The keen and kindly old man was evidently watching that no harm should come to Neville.

SAMANALA AND ITS SHADOW.

FAR away in the mystic East there rises, high to the sun, a great natural altar at which, since the dawn of ages, man has, without ceasing, worshipped until now. Over the dark-eyed impassive people of that strange unalterable East ages flow and leave no mark ; hundreds of generations are born and pass away and no change is wrought amongst them. There is an awfulness in their steady immobility. Dynasties may rise and fall, governments may come and go, the name of their belief may be changed and little differences in ritual and service may spring up, but from æon unto æon the *people* are unchanged. It is the same life that they lead and the same things that they worship.

Back, far back into the night of time, so far back that the very memory of those then living is irrevocably lost in the void of the forgotten past, the dark-skinned people, wandering naked and unashamed in the forest depths of the island of Ceylon, looked with wide eyes, in which the freshness and the wonder of the youth time of mankind still shone with the brightness of the dawn, upon Adam's Peak, the great solitary mountain rising, lonely in its grandeur and height, from the low hills around it and the sea of forest at its feet. Clouds capped its hoary summit, storms played around its heights, the very lightnings themselves, which they so dreaded and revered, seemed born amongst its great rocks and deep ravines, and gazing upon its sublimity in storm and upon its majesty in peace, they innocently wondered till wonder grew to worship.

Since then—through the times when, thousands of years ago, history first palely dawns on us against the impenetrable veil of the lost past—until this day, in the later years, one steady stream of prayer and praise has gone up from the height of that great mountain altar. So many millions of men have breathed their hopes, desires, and aspirations there in the ear of the voiceless, if hearing, God, that one would almost think the air must be thick and stagnant with them. Nature's impassiveness and irresponsiveness are terrible. One feels that—if helpless to aid the groaning millions who through the long, long centuries have

climbed her rocky flanks and scaled her wind-swept summit to reach a little nearer to the God who dwells in the aching blue above them—the mountain, in sheer sorrow for their useless toil and grief, in pity for their wasted labour and their wasted prayer, should long ago have crumbled into dust and fragments. One can hardly help feeling a foolish exultation that in the end, no matter how far off it be, the very mountain itself must be thrown down and levelled with the plain. But there is a terror in this too.

There is an ebb and flow on land as well as on the sea, a high tide and a low. If we substitute ages for seconds and vast periods of time for the hours of our day, which after all is but a question of degree, the very face of the solid earth itself will be found to fluctuate and change as does the surface of the sea. Plains rise and mountain ranges fall, seas are dried up and continents submerged with an undulation, one may almost say with an alteration and alternation that are as varied as the waves and flowing tides of the changeful sea itself. Gentle are the forces that make these changes; no mighty cataclysms do this work; soft and impalpable touches of cloud hands and the gentle wearing of the summer rain are the agents of destruction; but the impassivity of granite crags themselves must give way before their soft invincibility. Therein lies the terror of it.

But to our short-sighted vision the great mountain looks eternal, its grand bell-shaped dome rises vast and blue above the mass of green forest that lies at its feet and encroaches far up its lordly sides; and so slight have been the changes wrought upon its rocks by the wear and tear of four thousand years of storm, that the very paths to its sacred summit that were followed centuries before the beginning of the present era are worn by the feet of the weary pilgrims of to-day. There is a legend that the iron chains fastened to the walls of rock to give the pilgrims safety along the precipices of that last 'sky league' were placed there in the time, and by the order, of Alexander. The links, though worn, are sound even yet.

About a mountain such as this, beautiful in itself, long considered to be the loftiest in all Ceylon, and holy, if only from the steady voice of four thousand years of prayer, legends are sure to gather cloudlike and thick. Adam's Peak is clothed from base to summit with one great robe of myth and fabled story. Not a rock but has its history, not a brook without its legend of worshipper



or worshipped. Beneath this overhanging cliff Gautama Buddha slept, upon that dizzy height Buddha, in his second incarnation, prayed.

Although specially sacred to Buddha, it is not only Buddhists who regard this mountain as a holy spot. Hindoos and Mahomedans respect and reverence it, as, too, did our own Christian peoples in earlier and simpler times than these. But although the whole mountain is regarded as holy by all oriental peoples, it is only the sacred footprint on the bold crag at the very summit that is actually worshipped. To perform a pilgrimage to this and to lay an offering upon it is to a Buddhist what a visit to Mecca is to a Mahomedan. The time for the greatest number of pilgrims to visit the mountain is April and May, but all the year round a steady stream of devotees flows to this shrine of the most holy of all the relics of their great teacher.

The mountain is not very easy of access from the coast, and the ascent, though not difficult, is long and at times dangerous, so that it is not visited by Europeans as often as, from its interest, one might expect it to be. But it is well worth all the labour of the ascent, for not only is the shrine very curious and the whole mountain full of interest, but the view from the summit is one of the most extended and majestic in the whole world. It almost seems that all the earth is spread at one's feet, for one sees from sea to azure sea across the vast expanse of green tropical country. Hill and dale, broad valleys, and great plains covered with one dense growth of forest, with here and there stretches of low cultivated lands of a lighter green; rivers, like silver cords, wind in and out amongst the silent hills, and the eye can follow them, as they shine in the brilliant sunshine, till they are lost at last in the blue haze of the far horizon.

The ascent is usually made from Colombo, which is about sixty miles from the foot of the Peak. After crossing a level and uninteresting country of cultivated ground, of rice-fields and cocoanut plantations, one plunges into the forest-grown and creeper-tangled 'Wilderness of the Peak,' where even now, in these days of destruction and so-called sport, great herds of elephants roam, and where the jungle still swarms with black leopards and wild boar. Some of the roads which lead through the wild forest to the foot of Samanala (Adam's Peak) are mere uneven tracks which are almost impassable after heavy rains, and difficult and unpleasant at all times, but the majesty and grandeur of the gigantic

forest growth which surrounds one on all sides, and which is so thick and tangled overhead as to almost exclude the light of even the brightest tropical day, are enough to compensate the traveller for all he undergoes on his journey through it. Great masses of ruined masonry are often passed on these roads, melancholy witnesses of the splendour of the early empire, with here and there a stately column standing, on which is lavished a wealth of intricate decoration, to show where the stately pleasure-house of some great king once stood. Perhaps a huge ruin of brickwork, so vast that one almost doubts its human origin, now overgrown with a mass of great trees and brushwood, is all that is left of a once splendid and wealthy *wihare*, or, if it has been the shrine of some exceptionally valued relic of Gautama, there may be one old and withered priest still in charge of its ruined and desolate sanctity. Sometimes an enthusiast will consecrate himself to the labour of clearing one of these great ruined *dagobas* of the wild mass of vegetation which covers it, but clear it though he may, he does but arrest for a very short time its impending destruction.

The extent and beauty of the architectural remains of the great ruined cities in the interior of Ceylon are known but to few. There are many of them, and all are full of archaeologic and artistic interest. The city of Anuradhapura, to instance only one of them, is in its way as wonderful as Pompeii or those great forest-grown cities of Central America. It is situated in a most lovely spot among the green valleys and wooded hills of the interior of the island, and whichever way the eye is cast there are ruins, wonderfully beautiful ruins, of shrines, *dagobas*, pavilions, *wihares* and groups of tall monolithic pillars carved from base to capital with a wondrous wealth of oriental imagery. For miles the forest is strewn with these majestic monuments of a long-since perished glory. So vast are some of these great brickwork buildings that it is reckoned that the material of one *dagoba*, of the several at Anuradhapura, would be sufficient to build a wall of more than ninety miles long, twelve feet high, and two feet thick. The enormous artificial tombs, too, of this city might almost be included amongst the wonders of the world, so vast are the great *bunds* (dams) that confine the waters, and so marvellous their construction. They lie now embosomed in thick forest growth, and their shining waters are solitary but for the flocks of waterfowl upon them and the crocodiles which float lazily on the surface basking in the full glare of the vertical sun. The once busy banks are

now deserted, except by the bands of chattering monkeys which haunt it by day, and by herds of darkness-loving elephants, which, at night time, leave the inner depths of the forest and come there to bathe and drink. But this is a mere digression, which may be excused, perhaps, by those who once have felt the awe and mystery, the sorrow and the wonder, which these great dead cities summon up.

But to return to our mountain. The real ascent only begins after the *ambulam* at the foot of the Peak is reached. This *ambulam* (rest-house) has been built entirely for the convenience and shelter of the pilgrims constantly passing to and from the mountain, and one is almost certain to come upon a party of devotees either preparing for the ascent of the Peak or resting in thankfulness upon their return from it. Strange groups of pilgrims collect in this rough place of shelter, of many nations and of many creeds, and of every age, from the child in arms to the worn and wrinkled grandparents whose tottering steps have to be assisted by the younger men. At times the worshippers are so old and weak that they have to be carried from base to summit, on chairs when possible, and 'pick-a-back' when the path becomes too steep for chairs to be carried along it. This *ambulam* is at the very edge of the jungle, and is a mere shed with open sides, but it afforded shelter to a large group of Kandyans and hill-country Singhalese who were preparing their food before they began the ascent. The rest-house was not very large and could not contain all the party, so that some of the pilgrims had been obliged to take advantage of a sort of little cave formed by a huge boulder which overhung the ground. Under this they were squatting, while some of their number were cooking the meal outside.

A long line of happy pilgrims coming down from the sacred shrine, weary but full of enthusiasm, passed the *ambulam*; when close to it they turned once more to the mountain, and raising their thin brown arms above their heads, they uttered their long-drawn '*Säädu, säädu.*' This deep cry is their form of prayer, and corresponds somewhat to our own 'Amen.' The pilgrims are nearly always clad in spotless white, and to see them standing motionless in that great wilderness of dark forest and broken crag, with faces turned with passionate fervour to the holy peak, and arms stretched out in a perfect rapture of prayer, was a thing not easily to be forgotten.

Stiff climbing begins almost directly after the *ambulam* is

left. The path, the only available one, is steep and very stony, no attempts having ever been made to improve it. After following this track for some distance a swift and beautiful stream of bright clear water, which breaks into numberless cascades as it dashes headlong down from the height, is crossed, and the dense silent forest is again plunged into on the other side. At almost every step the ascent seems to grow steeper and the road worse. The path, if it be not a misapplication of terms to use that word, is nothing better than a watercourse which has been worn by the constant rain of ages to a deep ravine. The feet of the pilgrims, who for thousands of years have trodden this self-same track, have made irregular steps all along the path, some so high that none but a giant could step up to them, and others not more than a few inches above the last. This ravine is very narrow, so narrow that there is only room for one to pass at a time, and over and over again one has to squeeze against the rocky bank to let long lines of descending pilgrims go by. These high rocky sides of the gully rise far above one's head, and are clothed from the top to within about five feet of the ground with a rich mass of ferns and tiny plants.

About halfway up there is a rocky plateau where a cool breeze often blows; this breeze feels almost icy, blowing as it does on the body so greatly heated by the recent exertions. After this point the ascent becomes much more difficult, the water-worn ravines rising, in many places, almost perpendicularly. These wall-like rocks are only scaled with the utmost labour. Some way beyond this the ascent of the cone itself begins. At first it is a mass of naked rock up which it would be almost impossible to scale were it not for the steps which were cut in it ages ago by the pious hands of early pilgrims. Here the chains, spoken of before, begin. They are of iron, and are riveted into the wall of rock for the greater safety of such of the pilgrims as may be weak-headed. The mountain at this stage is quite bare of trees for some distance, and the precipices fall away, sometimes from the very brink of the path, almost sheer down for hundreds of feet to where, far, far below, the forest again begins.

After this space of hot, bare rock, where the cloudless sun seems to beat on one with almost perceptible pulsations, there is another stretch of forest, into the grateful shade of which one plunges as into a bath, and then again the path lies for a time in a narrow water-worn ravine. After this comes another series of

steps and chains, followed once more by a terribly steep bit of gully, up which one hauls oneself, panting and exhausted, to the last great flight of steps. This is an awful spot, and is one that is calculated to make dizzy the head of the strongest. On both sides of one stretches a great void of air, with nothing to be seen but a few faint clouds in the blue of the brilliant sky. Beneath one's feet the unfathomable abyss lies open, a chasm of unseen depth. This is no place to linger in—hurry on, the fascination is too awful. This great crag, which is close to the summit of the cone, is so terribly precipitous that, looking at it from below, the line of pilgrims descending it resembled insects clinging to the rock. One last effort, and then, giddy, exhausted, and trembling from the exertion, the topmost rocks of the cone are reached, and these last few feet being scaled the summit is gained.

The very apex of the Peak consists of a great crag which stands on a platform of rock; upon this crag there is a tiny terrace surrounded by low stone walls, and upon this upper terrace lies the huge boulder which bears the sacred footprint. This stone is covered with a wooden shrine of slender columns, which is open on all sides to the wild winds that rage there, and is only sheltered by a roof with shady overhanging eaves, from which hang down two ancient bells. Although the shrine offers but slight resistance to the elements, the winds which blow and beat about that sacred summit are so strong and wild that it has to be secured in its place by great chains, which pass over it and are fastened to the living rock below.

On the little terrace below the shrine, and at the foot of the ten steps leading to it, two Buddhist priests live in a poor and draughty hut built of mud and palm-leaves. It is about twelve feet long and six wide, and is of a very miserable description. The yellow gowns of poverty and the shaven heads of the Buddhists give them a very priestlike appearance. They receive visitors with hospitality, although they can do little for their comfort, and show the footprint and the sacred objects very willingly. The *sripada* itself is the rough outline of a gigantic foot impressed on the rock. It is about five feet long, and, although art has been brought to the aid of nature, it so little resembles the footprint of an ordinary man that it must take an enormous amount of faith and credulity to make anyone believe it to be the impress even of a god.

After sunset, and as night comes on, it becomes bitterly cold

upon the summit of the Peak. Mists slowly collect and fill the valleys which lie thousands of feet below, and these rise in white billowy clouds, which float between the earth and the topmost crags of the mountain, till one feels as completely cut off from the world of men as though alone upon a solitary islet in a vast untraversed sea. The moon shines down from a sky of cloudless black upon the rounded surface of the misty waves below, and the steady stars, undimmed by cloud or vapour, glow like lamps in the mighty arch. Later the clouds rise higher, and some of them detaching themselves from the rest, and floating through the mighty fields of silent air, just softly touch the solid rock of the sacred summit for that one moment, and then drift on again into night-filled spaces as vast and as profound as those from which they came.

Long before day palely dawns in the remoter east, the priests are astir and about, for they must be ready to receive the early pilgrims who flock to the summit to greet the sunrise. This is a keenly interesting and touching spectacle. When first the dim horizon begins to redden to the day, one hears sounds of people moving, and gradually the pilgrims come clambering up the crag, the earliest arrivals from the hut beneath the rock where they have passed the night—these are shivering with the unwonted cold—and then others, a little later, who have been toiling along the shrine-path all night through. If, before daybreak, one looks down from the parapet of the little upper terrace, the dim blaze of torches, far, far away below, can be distinguished here and there among the trees, where, in one long line, a band of worshippers is toiling up. Dotted about in the darkness, and moving hither and thither as the bearers walk, the tiny sparks look more like fireflies on the mountain side than the light of blazing *chulees*. The sound of their chanting can be heard as they approach the shrine, just breaking the cold silence of the dawn, at first so faint and far away as hardly to be distinguished from the stillness, and then the silence stirs and wakens to a life of sound. Gradually, as the pilgrims mount up higher, their strange chant swells louder, and grows slowly clearer and more clear, until, through the spreading daylight, the long white-robed file suddenly appears, one by one, from the steep precipitous stairs immediately beneath the terrace. Each man, as he reaches the little platform, puts out his light, bows down and worships. The act is unspeakably simple and touching.

As the crimson grows intenser in the windows of the morning, the eager faces with which the whole enclosure now is thronged gaze eastward with the keenest expectation and in breathless silence. Soon, through the red, a golden light floods up, and with a bound the blazing sun springs up, royal, strong, and young. Then every head is bowed, all hands are lifted up, and loud cries of '*Säädu, säädu!*' burst from the throats that have been aching for its utterance, and from lips that tremble with their almost frantic zeal. Until the whole fiery round of the sun is above the horizon these worshippers stand regarding it with a transfixed gaze; then they turn, and one by one ascend the steps to the sacred stone, carrying their offerings in their hands clasped high above their heads. Bowing once more they reverently place the gift upon the altar before the shrine, then striking the old bronze bell which hangs above the footprint, they turn and depart. It is a beautiful sight to witness, for all the lithe brown pilgrims are clad in garments of spotless white, and as they stand upon the apex of the rock the strong sunshine falls upon them so brightly that their robes become absolutely dazzling. Whilst the offerings are being laid upon the stone one or other of the priests, sitting in his yellow gown, reads or recites some passages from the sacred books, the listening people responding now and then with a loud '*Säädu!*'

Meanwhile from the other side of the terrace an even more interesting scene was to be witnessed. A wonderful natural phenomenon was occurring which was greater and more imposing than all the footprints in the world, but one that was disregarded by the worshippers of the stone. On to the sky was being thrown the celebrated 'Shadow of the Peak.' It was strange that, whilst the dreamy Easterns worshipped the substance of the mountain, the practical Westerns were regarding, with the interest and wonder that contain the elements of worship, the dusky shadow of it.

As the sun, so eagerly waited for by the watchers on the eastern parapet, rises above the horizon, there suddenly appears upon the western sky 'Samanala's Shadow.' It is a strange sight. On the very sky there looms the vast shadow of the mountain, standing out almost as distinct and clearly defined as the real object. It almost looks as though another Samanala had sprung up there by enchantment in the night. As the sun rises higher the great shadow swiftly lessens, till soon all trace of it has vanished from the sky, and it creeps with imperceptible but rapid

paces towards the place where the watcher stands. The long line of dense shadow that stretches to the horizon moves mysteriously towards one until, as the sun marches upward, it lies extended upon the great plain from which the mountain springs.

By this time day is fully come, and the sun is royally asserting his power. It is time to go. The early pilgrims are already leaving, and others, singing their chant and uttering their sacred invocation as they climb, are coming to take their place. There is only time for one last look upon the sacred shrine and one last rapid glance at the great panorama beneath it, and then farewell to the Peak. Perhaps after all—is it strange?—what is remembered longest is not the footprint, is not the shrine, is not the great and holy mountain itself, but the one brief sight of the constantly recurring, though ever fleeting, vision of the shadow of it.

IN THE REKKA HÖHLE.

THE recent appearance in one of the daily papers of an account of an exploration of part of the subterranean course of the Rekka by certain members of the Austro-German Alpine Club, reminds me vividly of an adventure of my own in the Karst, which cost me a prolonged period of intense mental agony, which for a time proved most disastrous in its effects on my health, and which, but for the merest chance, must have ended as tragically for me as it did for the ill-fated guide who accompanied me.

In the month of April, 187-, I held the appointment of civil surgeon in one of the districts of Behar, in the presidency of Bengal. We had just had a severe epidemic of cholera in the jail which was under my charge ; for some months past there had been an unusual amount of sickness in the district, and during the last three weeks constant demands on my services had kept me daily in the saddle for seven or eight hours out of the twenty-four. The strain on my strength, which under any circumstances would have been great, had been rendered still more severe by an exceptionally trying season, the hot winds which blow in Behar in the months of March and April having been fiercer that year than in the whole course of my long Indian experience. By constant exposure to them my face had, in fact, become blistered and my eyes inflamed to an extent that threatened to interfere seriously with my work.

In short, what with the effects of overwork and exposure, I was feeling thoroughly out of sorts, and I reluctantly made up my mind to avail myself of two months' 'privilege' leave that was due to me, and pay a hurried visit to England. My application was granted in due course ; and, after telegraphing to my wife, who was in London, to expect me there before the end of the following month, I started immediately for Bombay, intending to leave by the first mail steamer for Brindisi.

One of the first things I did after arriving at the hotel in Bombay was to lay in a stock of literature for the voyage, and among some dozen volumes which I purchased from an itinerant vendor of second-hand books were two odd volumes of the 'Calcutta Review,' which, I saw, contained, along with much

heavier matter, a series of pleasant, chatty articles, entitled 'The Unpublished Journal of Captain Musafir.'

Had my curiosity not got the better of my forethought, I should, no doubt, have reserved the reading of these two volumes, along with the rest, to beguile the tedium of the voyage. But time hung heavy on my hands in the afternoon, and 'Captain Musafir' proved irresistible.

The articles in question, which, as I subsequently ascertained, were from the pen of an officer of the Bengal Army, who was then known to fame as the author of the 'Red Pamphlet,' and has since acquired a considerable reputation as an historian, contained a charming account of a holiday tour in some of the most picturesque parts of Austria.

When the mind is suddenly set free from the worry of business and one finds himself in a quiet spot with nothing to preoccupy or disturb him, a pleasant book is apt to exercise a special fascination, and this is particularly the case if at the same time physical fatigue indisposes one, as it did me, to active exertion. To this cause, perhaps, it may have been due, as much as to the subject matter and the enthusiasm of the writer, that Captain Musafir's narrative took a singularly strong hold of my imagination. Especially was I struck with his description of the wonderful grotto at Adelsberg, a few hours' journey from Trieste. In fine, I conceived a strong desire to avail myself of my present opportunity to visit the spot, and, if possible, some of the other remarkable caverns in the Karst.

My wife, it was true, was expecting me in London; but she had been possessed for years with a longing to see Rome and Venice; and, as she was living in furnished rooms, where she was not particularly comfortable, it seemed probable that she would prefer meeting me in the latter place and spending a few days with me in Italy to waiting for me at home. So, having ascertained that an Austrian Lloyd's steamer would be leaving for Trieste on May 1, I went at once to the agent's, engaged a passage to that port, telegraphed to my wife to meet me at Venice on the 27th, and wrote to her by the outgoing mail, giving her a more detailed account of my plans.

During the sea voyage I completely recovered my health and strength, and when I landed at Trieste on the morning of May 23, I was feeling thoroughly fit for my projected excursion.

I put up for the night at the 'Aquila Nera,' and the following

morning, leaving my heavy luggage in the *cassa* of the hotel and taking with me only an overcoat and a light portmanteau, containing a couple of changes of linen, a handbook of the Karst, a supply of cigars, and a few other necessaries, started by the first train for Adelsberg. There, at the Widow Doxat's, a comfortable little hostelry, which I made my head-quarters, I found that it was necessary for intending visitors to give a couple of hours' notice to the custodian of the cavern, to enable him to make the necessary arrangements for its illumination ; so that the afternoon was well advanced before I could explore its wonders, which surpassed, rather than disappointed, my expectations, but which have been so often described that I need not trouble the reader with my impressions of them.

Learning that I proposed visiting the Trebitsch cavern on the following day, the guide, who informed me that he knew the ground well, offered to accompany me ; and, as he spoke a little English, I gladly accepted his services.

The morning was cloudy, but the guide was confident that there would be no rain to speak of ; so we took our tickets by the first train to Sessana, the nearest station to Orlik, whence the cavern is usually visited.

Soon after we had started the guide asked me whether I was provided with the necessary permit from the engineer of the Trieste waterworks to visit the Trebitsch cavern, and, on my replying in the negative, expressed a doubt whether we should be able to obtain admission without it. Presently he added that my journey need not be wasted. There was a group of caves at St. Canzian, near the intermediate station of Divazza, which were even better worth seeing. We could get out there, and, if I had another day to spare, I could get permission from Trieste by post and see the Trebitsch cave the following morning. I agreed that, if there was the least doubt of our obtaining admission to the Trebitsch cave without a pass, it would be better in the meantime to make sure of the others. So we alighted at Divazza.

Most travellers take a carriage from the station to St. Canzian ; but, as it was little more than an hour's walk, and I was anxious to study the geology of the country on the way, I elected to walk.

At the little inn where the key of the cave is kept there was no one about but a boy of about seven, who seemed half-witted and could not be made to understand what we wanted. What the

guide took to be the key of the gate leading to the Rekka Höhle was, however, hanging with several others on a nail in the wall, and, remarking that we had no time to waste, he took it down and suggested our starting at once.

I urged that we should wait a little longer ; but, as he pointed to the uncertainty of the weather, assuring me at the same time that he was well known to the custodian and would make matters all right on our return, I yielded, reflecting that, after all, he knew more about the ways of the place than I did.

Like most of the caverns in this remarkable region, the Rekka Höhle is entered from a *dolina*, or deep shaft in the limestone rock. The Rekka, during its underground course, pours into this *dolina*, with a fall of forty or fifty feet, into a dark and comparatively still pool, about as large as Westminster Hall, to re-enter the rock on the opposite side beneath a majestic arch, which, the guide-books say, is some sixty feet high, but which, owing to the great altitude of the wall above, does not look more than forty. A strong head and, in wet weather, sure feet are needed to descend with safety the very uneven steps by which the margin of the pool is reached, and which, for a great part of the distance, are unprotected by any kind of railing. Fortunately the limestone affords a tolerably good footing when dry, as it was at the time of my visit ; nevertheless I was not sorry when we arrived at the door that bars the passage half-way down, and beyond which the steps, which become steeper and narrower from this point, are protected by a wooden balustrade.

On trying the key in the lock we found that it did not fit. The guide had evidently brought away the wrong one, though he protested that the lock must have been lately changed. However, the bolt was easily forced back with the blade of his clasp-knife.

The view from the margin of the basin, which we reached after a further descent of some two hundred feet, is one which for mingled beauty and solemnity has few rivals in Europe. On one side, where, from a cleft in the reef above, the Rekka plunges thundering into the pool, an eddying, foaming cauldron of dark-brown and grey-green billows, flecked with pearly white ; on the other, a gathering rush of inky waters, where, with a sullen roar, it disappears again beneath the lofty archway in the rock ; in the centre, a comparatively still expanse of turquoise blue ; over all a subdued light, darkening into gloom in the shadow of the great limestone walls.

For a moment I stood fascinated, conscious only of the weird spectacle before me and the deafening tumult of the waters. But gradually an oppressive sense of isolation stole over me, and this was intensified as a great flight of doves winged their way upwards to the sky, proclaiming that the place, tenanted till then, was so no longer. Then the roar and fall of the waters, from a chaos of contending sounds, began to gather itself into cadences, till the whole simulated the stertorous breathing of some mighty demon of the under-world. From being merely curious the fancy grew appalling. After a few seconds it vanished, only to give place to an apprehension more reasonable in character, if not better founded. As I listened spellbound to the alternate ebb and flow of the tumult, a conviction suddenly seized me that it was steadily increasing in volume. What was more, this increase appeared to be taking place through a succession of reinforcements from the rear, so to speak. I seemed to hear each wave of added sound approach from a remote distance, growing gradually as it advanced, and finally merging itself in the roar of the cataract before me. So distinct, indeed, was the impression that by degrees the rhythm of these successive reinforcements obliterated that of the fall itself.

The limestone of the Karst country is like a sieve, and I knew that with heavy rain it was no uncommon thing for the water in the *dolinas* to rise twenty or thirty feet in as many minutes. Where we were, such a sudden flood would indeed mean nothing worse than a precipitate retreat by the steps we had just descended ; but in the recesses of the grotto, which we proposed exploring, it would be a much more serious matter.

I consulted Karl, but he detected nothing unusual in the sound of the torrent. The sky overhead was still clear ; there was no visible increase in the volume of the fall, and the level of the pool had undergone no change. Doubtless it was a mere aural illusion — a variation of the same subjective process which a minute before had converted the chorus of waters into the breathing of a living monster.

After ascending to a small grotto at the further end of the *dolina* and viewing the basin from that coign of vantage, we clambered up to a much larger cavern, not far from the arched tunnel through which the river disappears, and communicating with it in the interior of the rock by a somewhat steep, sloping gallery. Descending this gallery, we let ourselves down by a rope into a small boat, moored in the stream beneath the aperture, and

provided with a length of rope, by gradually paying out which the next fall was safely reached. From this point it is possible, at the cost of considerable labour, to make one's way several hundred feet further to yet another fall; but Karl, who was big with the secret of a great grotto, known, he declared, only to himself, and full of magnificent stalactites, persuaded me to give up the attempt in favour of a visit to this virgin ground, for conducting me to which he was to receive an extra fee of five gulden.

We accordingly hauled back to a point about midway between the third fall and the entrance to the Rekka Höhle, where, after several unsuccessful attempts, we at last managed, by our united efforts, to punt the boat across, stern foremost, into a narrow cleft in the opposite wall of the cavern, terminating in an archway not much more than five feet wide and between two and three feet high in the centre.

I have never experienced the first stage of petrifaction, but I can imagine it, and I have little doubt that it closely resembles the sensation I felt as it dawned on me that our further progress lay through that grim portal. Resistance in any dignified form was impossible, for the simple reason that my tongue was immovably fixed to the roof of my mouth, and when my Charon bade me stoop low, to avoid coming in contact with the rock above, I bowed my head to Fate with a sense of abject helplessness.

What happened for some minutes after that I scarcely know, except that, as the boat passed uneasily into the rat-hole through which we were to force our way, a rush of cold, damp air blew out both our candles and left us in a darkness that could be distinctly felt from the crown of the head to the soles of the feet.

After an interval of suspense that seemed interminable, our progress was arrested with a shock that precipitated me face foremost to the bottom of the boat. The guide struck a match and relighted his candle, by the faint glimmer of which I saw we had run upon a shelving bed of sand at the extremity of a chamber some forty feet long and almost as broad, the roof of which was high enough to admit of my standing upright.

Disembarking, and drawing the boat up on to the sand to prevent all risk of her drifting into deep water, we scrambled up the slope, which was somewhat steep after the first few feet. At the top, and possibly about ten feet above the level of the water, was another narrow archway, through which we just managed to creep on our hands and feet. Inside, we found ourselves in a semi-

circular pit, some thirty feet in diameter, the walls of which appeared in the gloom almost perpendicular, but which Karl scaled with the agility of a goat. On reaching the top he proceeded to light several other candles, which he planted on the edge, and by their aid I managed to follow him without much difficulty.

A singular sight presented itself above. Extending on all sides, from within a few feet of where we stood into the darkness, was a forest of pillars, ranged without regularity at intervals of from one or two to eight or ten feet, and surmounted in most cases by more or less perfect arches, which seemed to support the roof of the cave. In many instances, where the pillars were closely set, the intervals were filled wholly or partially with screens of semi-transparent stalactite. In some cases closed alcoves were thus formed, which, when a light was placed in them, had the appearance of great horn lanterns.

After we had proceeded about a hundred paces, the distance between the pillars began gradually to increase, and a little further on they ceased altogether, and we found ourselves in what, on examination, proved to be a vast rotunda, of whose roof nothing was visible but the stalactites which here and there reflected the light of our candles. Most of these stalactites I estimated to be forty or fifty feet above our heads; but a little to the right of our path one was dimly discernible in the distance which seemed to descend to within twenty feet of the floor, and by its size and shape invited closer inspection. As we approached it, the lower part gradually resolved itself into what looked strangely like a pair of human legs with the feet slightly drawn up. At this moment a pool of deep water arrested our progress and threatened to baffle my curiosity. The guide went back and brought up the candles which we had left burning at different points in the hall of columns; but their united light made little or no impression on the deep darkness that hung over the pool, and I was on the point of abandoning the investigation when I remembered that I had still in my waistcoat pocket a few inches of magnesium ribbon that had been left unburnt at Adelsberg the day before.

I ignited it, and a shudder ran through me as the blaze of white light revealed the perfect figure of a woman suspended from the roof of the cavern by a long, thick rope, round which the hair of her head was twisted; the arms appeared as though pinioned behind; the contour of the body was that proper to the prime of life; even the features, turned towards me in half profile, were

plainly distinguishable. Rope, hair, eyes, limbs, all were of one hue—a dull, greenish white.

Marvellous as, from what I had recently seen at Adelsberg, I knew the mimetic powers of Nature in the shaping of these fantastic formations to be, it seemed, as I stood and gazed on the figure before me, that the improbability of its having been fashioned in mid-air, out of brute matter, by the equilibration of mere mechanical and chemical forces, was humanly indistinguishable from impossibility. Was it the record, preserved by Nature in imperishable marble, of some deed of blood done ages ago in the living flesh—the petrified corpse, in a word, of a murdered woman? Was it the work of some mocking spirit, denizen of those dark recesses, bent on thus proving his plastic skill and his knowledge of human anatomy? Or must I accept the paradox that accident, infinitely multiplied, had simulated here the handiwork of a Phidias?

By what process of logic I chose the last hypothesis it would not be easy to explain. Even to this hour, when I reflect how overwhelming at each turn in the surface must have been the chances against the accretion proceeding in the right direction and in no other, and again how immense the improbability of its being finally arrested at the precise stage when the just proportions of the human form had been exactly fulfilled, the phenomenon assumes the aspect of a protest against our ordinary conceptions of the universe.

Beyond the rotunda the grotto again took the form of a comparatively narrow gallery, which the guide told me he had only partially explored. It contained, he said, many curious stalactites, but the floor was much broken and full of pools and deep fissures. As one or two of our candles had already gone out and the rest were burning low, it was settled that before we attempted to explore it he should go back to the boat and get a fresh supply, which he had left there.

After he had gone, I took the longest of the pieces of candle and, extinguishing the rest, which I stowed away in one of the pockets of my overcoat, walked slowly in the direction of the further gallery, entered it and examined it for a few yards, and then came back and awaited his return at the entrance.

Four or five minutes must have elapsed when I thought I heard a faint shout from the direction of the hall of columns. I hallooed in return, but, if there was any response, it must have been drowned

in the prolonged echo that reverberated through the rotunda, at one moment dying slowly away and at another seeming to revive and gather fresh strength, as it broke forth from some remote corner. At length all was again silent as the grave, and then there came a louder cry, a wail of mingled entreaty and despair, that chilled the very marrow of my bones, and, though inarticulate, seemed with cruel clearness to pronounce the doom, 'Too late!'

For a moment a palsy seized my knees, and I stood rivetted, like one in a nightmare, to the ground. Then, forgetful of the inevitable consequence, I set off running. In an instant the frail flame of the taper in my hand was quenched, and I was left in impenetrable darkness. Fortunately I had with me a box of matches; but, when I came to strike them, I found that the damp of the cave had already affected them, and, one after another, they either refused altogether to ignite, or burst hissing and spitting into only a momentary and ineffectual flame. At last, by striking three or four together, I succeeded in relighting my candle, and, proceeding at a more deliberate pace, had made my way, without further mishap, to within a few feet of the entrance of the hall of columns, when a sudden gust of wind caught the flame and nearly extinguished it. Protecting the candle with my hat, I advanced still more cautiously, the rush of air increasing at every step, till it threatened to sweep me off my feet and made further progress with the light impossible.

Time was everything. Should I retreat to the rotunda and wait till the subterranean hurricane subsided, or should I press forward at all hazards in the darkness? I determined on the latter course, and, pressing my hat down tightly on my head, began to grope my way from column to column. Every now and then I paused and shouted with all my might, but my voice was drowned by the roar of the wind, rushing towards the rotunda. Though I made every effort to keep in a straight line, it was not long before my sense of direction became hopelessly confused. At one moment an apprehension possessed me that I was moving in a circle; at another I felt that I must be going back towards the rotunda, for the current of air, which might have guided me, had begun to blow in all directions by turns.

I know of no sensation so utterly unnerving as that of having lost all clue to one's position in space. A deadly sickness came over me. I halted, leaned against a column, and broke out into

a cold perspiration. Then, recovering somewhat, I made a strong effort to collect myself, but it was in vain that I tried to arrive at any conclusion as to the direction in which I ought to steer.

Had all been well, there should, before this, have been some sign of light from the guide's candle ; but not the faintest glimmer was anywhere visible.

Quite suddenly the rush of wind ceased. I relighted my candle with less difficulty than before, and discovered that I was within half-a-dozen paces of the semicircular pit in which we had found ourselves on first entering the grotto. I hurried to the edge. No guide was to be seen ; and, on looking down, I found, to my horror, that the pit was half full of water.

The truth, though not the whole truth, flashed instantly upon me. There had been a sudden rise of the water in the Rekka Höhle—a rise, as I calculated, of at least twenty feet—and the guide, foreseeing that the boat, if caught in the low chamber where we had left it, would be capsized on the water reaching the roof, and our means of retreat thus cut off, had, no doubt, on the first alarm, pushed off and pointed her back into the main channel. I had but to wait patiently, then, till the flood subsided, which, except in case of continued bad weather, it might be expected to do in an hour or less, and I should be released.

Reassured by this review of the probabilities of the case, I lit a cigar, and, sitting down on the edge of the pit, anxiously watched the water.

At the end of five minutes it had fallen at least a foot. Then there was a pause, followed by a slight rise ; but the only anxiety I felt was lest I might have to wait in the dark ; for the piece of candle I had lighted could hardly burn more than half an hour longer, and, even if I ventured to use up the other pieces, they would last, at the most, a couple of hours more.

Presently the water began to fall again, more rapidly than before. I clambered down and tried the depth. It was less than two feet. The top of the archway leading into the adjoining chamber ought, then, to be uncovered, for we had crawled through it on our hands and knees with room to spare. Yet, strange to say, no aperture was visible. I reclimbed the side of the pit, took off my boots and socks, tucked up my trousers, and, lighting one of the remaining candle-ends, descended again and waded towards the opposite side. Before I had got more than half-way across,

the floor of the pit, which, I distinctly remembered, had, at the time of my arrival, been quite smooth and flat, became, to my surprise, rough and stony, and immediately beyond began suddenly to rise. I held out the candle at arm's length in front of me, and, great heavens! instead of the archway that should have been there, saw a shelving bank of rocky débris, resting against the wall of the chamber and reaching upwards to a height of at least eight feet.

How long, after the first great thrill of despair, I stood, half conscious, gazing helplessly at the fatal avalanche, I know not. It could not have been less than a quarter of an hour, for I was suddenly awakened from my stupor by finding myself in total darkness. Then I shouted and shouted again, till sheer hoarseness compelled me to desist; but there came no answer, save strange ghostly echoes from distant recesses of the cave—echoes that, by their hideousness, woke up all the nameless terrors of the dark that had lain dormant in me since early childhood—dread of demoniac clutchings at feet and face and hair; of skeleton embraces; of monster, spectral eyes, faceless, unlidded, framed in the pitchy air. To stand erect was terror, for what might descend from above; to move was greater terror, for what might be crowding around; to stoop down was uttermost terror, for what might lurk below!

In vain I struggled to collect my thoughts; in vain sought some point of contact with the physical world; in vain appealed to common sense, to scientific belief, against the phantom legions that seem to people all space. My whole flesh crept; the crown of my head pricked and tingled, as though it had been galvanised; a sudden vertigo seized me, followed by a violent fit of shivering.

The slightest of causes at length restored my mental balance. The last gurglings of the retreating water, as it quitted the heap of fallen stones, called back the realities of things—realities which, despite their grimness, were heaven to the hell they replaced. I listened, as to some sweet and familiar melody, till all was still again. Then I lighted another piece of candle and proceeded to examine the heap more closely, moving away the smaller stones, till I came to a great boulder, the surface of which I followed up to the wall of the chamber, three feet above the opening, access to which it completely barred.

The terrible thought came over me, that the guide might lie

crushed beneath that boulder, and, with him, my only hope of deliverance from the most horrible of deaths.

Though my candle soon went out, I persevered in my work of clearing away the smaller débris, but only to find that there was nowhere room to insert even a finger between the boulder, which must weigh some tons, and the wall of my prison. Still I did not at once despair. The chances, after all, seemed strongly in favour of the guide having made good his retreat, in which case succour could only be a question of hours.

The darkness, for the time being, had lost its terrors; indeed, I felt strangely composed, and, resisting the temptation to light another piece of candle, I managed to feel my way back into the grotto above, and, sitting down with my back against a column, made up my mind to wait events with patience. Of a truth, I could do little else. To move, even by a hair's breadth, the boulder that barred the exit from the cave was utterly beyond my power, and the only tool I had with me was an ordinary penknife.

For what seemed many hours I reclined there, revolving in my mind all the probabilities of my situation.

If the guide had escaped with his life, all would surely be well; but, if not, the more I reflected on the circumstances of my unfortunate expedition, the more desperate the case seemed. The guide would be missed sooner or later—of that I made no doubt. That he would be sought for was hardly less certain, and, under ordinary circumstances, there would have been every chance of his being traced. But how did matters actually stand? We had left Adelsberg with the avowed intention of exploring the Trebitsch cave, not the Rekka Höhle, and we had taken our tickets for Sessana, not Divazza. Even should it transpire that our tickets had been given up at Divazza, and enquiries be consequently made at St. Canzian, the clue would be lost; for at St. Canzian we had seen no one but an idiot boy, incapable, apparently, of understanding our enquiries; and, then, had we not brought away the wrong key? and was not the right key in all probability still hanging in its place, to bear unimpeachable testimony to the fact of no one having visited the Rekka Höhle? Again, even if the Rekka Höhle should be searched, as, sooner or later, no doubt it would be, what chance was there of our being traced, seeing that one of us was crushed to death, and the other buried alive in an unknown branch of the cave, the entrance to which was likely to be passed unnoticed by anyone not previously acquainted with it?

The *dolina* would be dragged, and, perhaps, the course of the Rekka to the fourth cataract, and then the search would be abandoned.

After an interval of the length of which I can form no conception, passed in these and similar speculations, I may perhaps have dozed; for though I had no recollection of having dreamed, my thoughts merged into one of those strange sensations that belong to the borderland between waking and sleeping—a sensation of one of my legs swelling and lengthening, and lengthening and swelling, till it filled the whole cavern, enveloping columns and insinuating itself into nooks and crevices, where it got squeezed and pinched. I started, to find it numb and cramped, and, rousing myself, struck a match, to make sure of my surroundings, and paced to and fro for a time between two of the pillars. The temptation was strong to light another piece of candle, but I remembered I had only a few inches left, and determined to reserve my scanty store for occasions of greater necessity.

My sense of time, in the absence of any means of marking it, was growing sadly confused. I could not be certain that I had not slept, and it already seemed days since I had entered the cave. Thirst began to torture me, and I longed to drink from the pool in the rotunda, but I dreaded going so far from the entrance of the cave, lest I should miss some sound of search or succour. At last the torture became unendurable, and I lighted the last but three of the remaining candle-ends and made my way to the pool, counting the pillars as I went and the number of paces from the last pillar to the pool, that I might be able to find it in the dark in future. When I returned to my old position, a few feet from the edge of the pit, I must have slept again, though I tried hard to keep awake.

It was quite in vain now that I endeavoured to form even an approximate notion of the time I had been immured. So indeterminate, indeed, had my sense of duration become that, when at rest, I could not tell whether hours passed or days. Sometimes I would try to correct this vagueness by counting; but I found that I was constantly losing my reckoning, and, in the end, the occupation became so irritating that I was obliged to abandon it. In the absence of all external movement, the operations of my mind were the only measure available to me; but to appeal to this criterion was to fall under an illusion. My thoughts, as in a dream, began to create for themselves a special time of their own,

which became gradually less and less distinguishable from that which the things thought of would have occupied if they had been real. As my imagination had grown preternaturally active, traversing again and again not only the events of my recent life, but much that was long past, and not a little that had lain for years unremembered, there were moments when more than half my life seemed to have passed since I had last seen the light of day.

That I had not eaten since I came into the cave, and that, though feeling very weak, I was still alive, these two facts, viewed in the light of calm reason, furnished a strong presumption against my imprisonment having lasted many days. But between this conclusion and the testimony of my memory there was an irreconcileable contradiction, which seemed at times to assume the form of a conflict between scientific theory and actual fact.

I had brought half-a-dozen biscuits with me, and I ate one, more from a desire to give myself a fair chance than to satisfy any craving, for, strange to say, I was not at all hungry. I had still a cigar left. Should I waste a precious match in lighting it? I counted my matches. There were just fifteen left. Remembering that, when I had last used them, I had found three out of four bad, I hesitated. For what seemed hours I resisted the temptation; but the craving at last got the better of me, and I enjoyed that cigar as I have never enjoyed one before or since.

Then came an interval of prolonged semi-stupor, of which I remember little more than that I was aroused several times by a sense of burning thirst, and as often groped and measured my way to the pool and drank. On the last of these occasions I must have fallen asleep not far from the edge of the pool. Indeed, I must have composed myself to sleep deliberately, though I have no recollection of it. All I know is that I drank long and eagerly, and, after falling for countless ages through a depth beyond the power of waking thought to fathom, found myself extended at full length on the ground, with my overcoat carefully folded underneath me.

For the first time I now felt hungry; but, when I came to examine my biscuits, I found, to my astonishment and dismay, that there was only one left out of the five that should have been in my pocket. The rest could not have fallen out, for this one was carefully folded in the paper that contained it, and the only conclusion I could arrive at was that I must have eaten them in

my sleep. The horror of death by starvation, which, in the absence of all appetite, I had scarcely realised before, now stared me full in the face. The prospect seemed to spur me to exertion, and I even began to reproach myself for having allowed such a length of time to pass without making any effort to escape. Yet what, I asked myself, could I have done? What could I do? For a long time nothing more hopeful than waiting suggested itself. One thing, indeed, I might have done, had I not been deterred from it by the fear to which I have already referred. I might have made an effort to explore the gallery that led from the further side of the rotunda.

The idea was a desperate one at the best, for I had only three inches of candle left; all I knew of the ground was what the guide had told me, that it was full of difficulties, and, should any accident happen to my light, I might be unable to find my way back.

However, I determined to make the experiment. In order that I might have my hands free for climbing, I cut four holes in the front of my hard felt hat, and, having bound the handle of my penknife to it with a piece of string, so that the blade projected a little above the crown, fixed the candle-end on the point. Then I ate half my last biscuit, and, after taking a draught of water and lighting the candle, set off on my voyage of discovery.

The gallery proved narrow and tortuous, and my progress, owing to frequent boulders and chasms, some of the latter ten or twelve feet deep, laborious rather than difficult or dangerous. No opening was anywhere visible; but when, as far as I could judge, I had penetrated about eight hundred paces, the passage suddenly widened, and a stream of slowly flowing water, about two feet deep, crossed it almost at right angles, entering the gallery on the left and leaving it again on the right by filtration through the rock.

I was now thoroughly exhausted, and, finding that more than an inch of my candle was already burnt, I determined to put it out and rest awhile.

No sooner was I in darkness than, in the far distance in front of me, the floor and a portion of the left wall of the cave seemed to be steeped, for a space of several yards, in a flood of pale bluish light—a steady, diffused light, which covered a well-defined area, and, though apparently reflected, seemed to come from nowhere in particular.

Could it be moonlight? A strange thrill ran through me; a lump rose in my throat; and, instead of following my first impulse, to shout for joy, I burst into a flood of tears.

For a few moments I struggled in vain to control my feelings; then an impulse seized me to rush forward, regardless of the water in front of me; but my head swam, I trembled in every limb, and it was only by a powerful effort that I could keep myself from falling. There was plainly nothing to be done but to wait patiently till I should have recovered from my fatigue and excitement; so, folding my overcoat again, I lay down on it and watched the light in an agony of expectation and suspense.

After I had gazed at the light intently for some time, it no longer seemed to glow with the same steady radiance as at first, but to vary in intensity from one minute to another, while I thought I detected certain pulsating points of special brilliancy, and a rippling, quivering movement seemed now and again to traverse the entire luminous space. The only explanation of these appearances that suggested itself to me was that the light might be that of the moon, partially obscured from time to time by flying clouds and shining on water in motion.

It must, I should think, have been at least an hour before I felt well enough to make a fresh start. No sooner had I relighted my candle than every vestige of the illumination in the distance disappeared; so, finding the floor of the cavern beyond the stream comparatively smooth and free from obstacles, I put it out.

As I approached the illuminated space, which proved much nearer than it had seemed, a faint light seemed to hang over it, and presently it became evident that this proceeded from something slightly raised above the surface of the ground. Had I, then, been buoying myself up with false hope? A sudden qualm came over me, such as one feels during the first moments of an earthquake. A few feet only now separated me from the shining mass. Whatever it might be, it was obviously self-luminous. For a moment I stood stunned and motionless. Then curiosity gave me fresh nerve, and, taking another step forward, I stooped and passed my hand over a portion of the surface from which the light proceeded. It was leathery, cold, and clammy to the touch; and, as I withdrew my hand, I saw that it, too, was aglow with phosphorescent light.

Breaking off a fragment of the luminous substance, I examined it more closely. Its texture and its form, plainly defined in its

own light, left no room for doubt as to its character. It was a phosphorescent fungus.

I did not stay to examine the rest of the mass, which covered some square yards of the floor and a portion of the adjoining wall of the cave, but, relighting my candle, hurried back, broken-hearted, to my old post near the mouth of the grotto, and lay down to die.

As I lay, I know not what tempted me—it was not hunger, nor was it a desire to hasten my inevitable end, but rather a mere morbid craving—to swallow a portion of the foul toadstool I had brought away with me. It was slightly sweet, and not unlike manna to the taste. No sooner had I eaten it than an intense feeling of drowsiness came over me, and, at the same time, a sound, as of a mighty rush and tumult of waters, filled my whole brain. I had no doubt that I was dying, but my only feeling was that of a blessed sense of deliverance.

All at once the noise ceased, and I sank eternally through some soft substance which offered no resistance to my descent, but the gentle, downy friction of which against the surface of my body, as it circled perpetually around me, produced in every fibre of my being a sense of exquisite delight. ‘If this is death,’ I exclaimed, ‘who would live?’

As I uttered the words a purple light burst forth and filled all space; I became aware of a feeling of compression about my wrists, and, at the same instant, my descent was suddenly arrested, and I hung suspended painfully by the arms. ‘In the name of God,’ I cried, ‘let me go!’

The only response to my appeal was a cry, thrice repeated; faint at first, as if from some distant world, then louder, then ringing and exultant: ‘He lives! He lives!! He lives!!!’

I became conscious. I opened my eyes. A group of men with flaming torches stood around, and, bending over me, with both my hands grasped tightly in hers, was—my wife.

How we wept in one another’s arms, to be peremptorily parted, after a few brief, happy moments, by the medical man my wife had brought with her from Adelsberg; and how, after sundry ministrations of soup from the doctor’s flask, I was conveyed out of the cave and carried, first to Divazza, where I was put to bed without being allowed to see my wife again, and then, the next morning, by train to Adelsberg, I need not relate.

The story of my rescue may be briefly told.

After waiting in vain for me at Venice for a week, my wife became seriously alarmed and proceeded to Trieste. Arrived there, she had no difficulty in tracing me to the 'Aquila Nera,' and ascertained that I had left for Adelsberg on the 24th May, with the intention of returning in a couple of days. Starting without delay for Adelsberg, she reached that place to learn that an Englishman, who had left the Widow Doxat's hotel for Sessana on the 25th May, had been missing, together with his guide, since that date. Her worst fears were confirmed when, going to the hotel, she identified as mine the portmanteau left behind by the missing traveller, and was further informed that every nook and corner of the Karst had already been searched without result.

On closer enquiry, however, it transpired that it had been thought unnecessary to examine the Rekka Höhle, as it had been ascertained at St. Canzian that the key of the door leading to the *dolina* had not been out of the possession of the custodian for more than a fortnight. My wife naturally insisted on the necessity of searching the cave in question without delay, and, with the aid of the doctor already mentioned, a party was promptly organised for the purpose.

It is unnecessary to enter into all the details of what followed. The absence of the boat from its place in the cave, combined with the fact of the door leading to the *dolina* being found open, left no doubt that an accident had happened. Fortunately the rope by which the boat was held, and which the guide had paid out as he passed through the low tunnel into the antechamber of my prison, had not parted, and, on an attempt being made to haul it in, it was found that it passed into an opening on the opposite side of the cave.

By means of a canoe procured from one of the neighbouring *dolinas*, the chamber was reached, and, on its being dragged, our boat was found, bottom upwards, in deep water, with the body of the unfortunate guide under it. An examination of the shelving bank of sand at the further extremity of the chamber resulted in the discovery of footprints leading to the archway at the top. The appearance of the débris which strewed the ground showed that the boulder which blocked the opening had, in all probability, recently fallen, and after some hours' labour an entrance was effected, with the result that I was released, as already described, after having been immured for ten days in the bowels of the earth.

GREY WETHERS.

A GREY WETHER is not a peculiar form of sheep, entered to be judged in a special class by the learned breeders who usually compose a cattle-show jury. It presents, in fact, about the same sort of analogy to a live wether that a pillar of salt does to Lot's wife. In the concise and graceful language of the geological text-books, it is 'a block of saccharoid sandstone,' which, I suppose, may be regarded as scientific English for a big boulder closely resembling a gigantic lump of brown sugar. All over the surface of Salisbury Plain (so called because it consists, in reality, of an undulating upland), and along the high ridges of the Marlborough Downs, you may see these gigantic Grey Wethers, reclining peacefully in the eye of the sun, and looking really, at a little distance, very much like a scattered flock of sheep of Titanic proportions. Some of them are twelve or fifteen feet across, and about four or five feet in thickness; and they lie on the surface of the shallow turf, like the squatting toadstone on Tunbridge Wells common, great naked masses of hard but friable sandstone rock, in the midst of a wide and unvaried chalk country. How they got there was, and is still in some ways, a profound mystery. Their presence on the spot has been variously attributed at different periods to Merlin and to the Devil, to the Universal Deluge and to the great Ice Age; geologists have referred them to the action of denudation, and popular fancy has, perhaps with higher probability, attributed them to the agency of the elves, the fairies, the Druids, and the Saracens.

But the problem how these huge blocks of shapeless sandstone came to find themselves isolated on the hilltops in the midst of a bare and unvaried chalk country is not by any means the only point that gives interest and dignity to the Grey Wethers. They derive a far deeper and more human claim to attention from the fact that they compose the stone of which the great outer circle of trilithons at Stonehenge is built; and all the secret of Stonehenge itself is closely bound up with the kindred secret of the Grey Wethers. Even local tradition knows as much as that, for it declares that when the Devil, or Merlin, or some other person or persons unknown, first transported the hanging stones of the

great temple, by magic art, through the air from Ireland, he dropped a few of them carelessly on the way over the Wiltshire downs; and these stones, thus let fall by accident in the midst of the bare chalk country, are the Grey Wethers. Tradition often contains a wonderful kernel of truth; and this one, as preserved for us by Aubrey and others, enshrines two or three various bits of really genuine antiquarian intelligence. In the first place, it recognises the original identity of the Grey Wethers and the Stonehenge trilithons. In the second place, it declares that Stonehenge is a foreign temple, as imported. And in the third place, it attributes the importation to Merlin, the Devil, the Druids, the Saracens, or the fairies, all of whom, in spite of accidental diversities, have this much at least in common, that they are all wicked, all heterodox, all ancient, and all magical.

The Grey Wethers, like modern swindlers, have several other names as well: they are known by the aliases of Druid Stones and Sarsen Stones; which last designation—by far the commonest at the present day—has a very curious and interesting origin. It is a corruption of Saracen. Now, what on earth have the Saracens to do with the county of Wilts in that part of the United Kingdom known as England? There were Moors in Provence, as everybody knows, and Buddhists in Mexico, as some people assert, but were there ever any Saracens in Wiltshire? Rather not. To the mediæval fancy, all Paynims were Saracens alike: worshippers of Mahomed, or, what came to pretty much the same thing, of the Devil in person. Your mediæval thinker made as little distinction as a modern missionary between Mahomedans and Pagans; he regarded them all equally as dogs of Saracens, and he mixed up in one universal condemnation, as the Prayer Book does in one concise petition, Jews, Turks, Heretics, and Infidels. Now, the English people in the Middle Ages knew in a dim, half-mythical fashion, that Stonehenge and the other great scattered megalithic monuments, like cromlechs and dolmens, were all the work of some pre-historic Pagans, and connected with some forgotten heathen religion. Therefore it obviously followed that they were Saracen stones. The conclusion flows logically from the premisses: it is only the premisses themselves that are a little bit confused and muddled. After all, the mediæval blunder is not much more absurd or much more unauthorised than the modern one which regards all these vastly archaic and pre-historic structures as

'Druidical monuments.' Because there were once Druids in England, and because the Druids were 'Ancient Britons,' and because these stones are also very ancient, therefore the stones were set up by the Druids. We might on precisely the same grounds assign every Roman object found in Britain to Julius Cæsar, and every coin of George I. or James II. to William the Conqueror. As a matter of fact, Stonehenge was already hoary with the rime of ages when the first Druid missionary set foot, with his tribesmen, on the soil of England; and the so-called Druidical monuments generally have no more to do with those very shadowy and half-mythical Celtic priests than they have to do with St. Augustine of Canterbury, or St. Thomas à Becket, or the Salvation Army.

Let us see, then, what is the real history of the Sarsen Stones, or Grey Wethers, as revealed for us on the one hand by geology, and on the other hand by modern archaeological research.

The first thing that strikes one whenever one examines a Grey Wether, is the fact that it is very much weathered indeed. It is a hard lump or kernel of friable sandstone, worn away on every side by rain and wind; a mere relic or solid core of what was once a much larger and broader piece of sandstone. But the odd point is that these isolated blocks occur now in a country where there is no rock of any sort, save chalk, for miles and miles around in every direction. Why is this? Well, it is now pretty certain that once upon a time (a very safe date) a great sheet of just such friable sandstone overlay the whole of the English chalk downs. At that remote period, of course, they were therefore not chalk downs at all, but sandy uplands of the same character as the pine-clad country round Bagshot and Woking, where the troops from Aldershot camp out in summer-time. In point of fact, this layer of sandstone, or rather several such layers, still cap the chalk in all the London basin; and by boring through them you come at last upon the underlying chalk, beneath several hundred feet thickness of superficial deposits. But on the higher uplands of Wiltshire and Berkshire the rain and streams have gradually worn away and removed piecemeal the whole of the eocene and other upper layers, cutting down the hills to the level of the chalk beneath, and leaving only a few of the very hardest and lumpiest kernels of the sandstone strewn loosely about on the surface of the downs. These kernels are the problematical Sarsen Stones. Some of them seem to be derived from one layer of tertiary deposits, and some

from another; but they remain at the present day as solitary witnesses to the vast thickness of similar rock which has been slowly removed from the summit of the chalk downs by the rains and torrents of a million winters. They are but the last fragments of a wide-spread deposit which once covered the whole south of England with its barren sheet, and of which larger patches still remain among the wild heaths of Wilts or Surrey and the slopes of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.

Chalk country is always noticeable for three great wants: the want of wood, the want of water, and the want of building-stone. Broken flints are the chief architectural material of the English downs, and they are employed impartially for walls and houses, church towers and monastic buildings, throughout the whole of the fruitful chalk belt. Accordingly, from very early times, the utilitarian philosophy of bucolic man set him to work to utilise the Sarsen Stones for his own purposes. The stones serve to this day, wherever they occur, for walls and gate-posts, for farm buildings and paving-stones; and, worse than all, these mystic relics of a remote antiquity are pounded up by the representatives of the late Mr. Macadam for the vulgar purpose of making road metal. Hence it is not surprising that the number of Sarsen Stones to be found *in situ*, where nature left them, is year by year rapidly diminishing, and that in the course of time the last Grey Wether will disappear entirely from Wiltshire, save where accidental use in the formation of a pre-historic monument may happily save it from final destruction by the iconoclastic forces of the nineteenth century. Even that hallowing antiquity may not always preserve it from untimely desecration; for what earthly thing is sacred in the greedy eyes of the modern contractor and his myriad myrmidons? Not the tombstones of the dead, or the memorials of the past; not the Roman vallum, or the pre-historic fosse; not hoary antiquity, or natural beauty. Nothing but the almighty dollar, the divine locomotive, vested interests, and a ten per cent. dividend. They would cheerfully chip up Henry the Seventh's chapel at Westminster as material for mending the street at Whitehall, or drive a permanent way with patent sleepers through the very centre of the inner circle at Stonehenge. They would regard the trilithons as a shocking waste of good building-stone, and they care less than nothing for any inner circles, save in the solitary instance of the Metropolitan and District railways.

But pre-historic man, like every dog, had once his day, and in

his day the Sarsen Stones of Wiltshire appeared to him also, after his primitive fashion, an excellent building-stone for architectural purposes. Long, long ago, before England was yet even Britain, in the dim old days of the newer Stone Age, when short squat men of Finnish or Euskarian breed occupied the whole of what are now the British Isles, the utilisation of the Grey Wethers first began for practical objects. ‘Let us exploit the Sarsen Stones,’ said primitive man, in his own language (probably agglutinative), and straightway he began to pile them up into dolmens and cromlechs, gigantic trilithons and pre-historic temples. And then it was, as modern archaeology tends every day more and more fully to show, that the large circles of Stonehenge were first piled up on Salisbury Plain. There can be little doubt at the present day that Stonehenge is a tribal temple of some petty Wiltshire kingdom in the newer Stone Age, and that it antedates by several thousand years the arrival of the Celtic Aryan conquerors in the isle of Britain.

The really curious point about Stonehenge, however, is this—that it does not all consist of Grey Wethers, though the biggest and most conspicuous of all the trilithons are composed of those huge local boulders. There are other stones in that ancient temple which came from some far more distant land—stones the like of which certainly cannot be found within a hundred miles of Salisbury Plain, and some of which, in all probability, can only be matched on the continent of Europe. Stonehenge is undeniably not a native Wiltshire monument; it is probably not even British at all.

In order to understand this very strange and mysterious fact, we must look a little more closely at the composition of this great surviving specimen of stone-age architecture.

The focus or real centre of the Stonehenge temple is the so-called altar-stone, which occupies precisely the same position in the primitive structure as the high altar occupies in most modern Roman Catholic cathedrals. But this very altar-stone, the great central fact around which all the rest of the ancient building clusters, is *not* a Grey Wether, nor a Wiltshire stone at all: it is an imported slab of felspathic hornstone, plentiful in some parts of Wales, about Carnarvonshire and Montgomeryshire, but utterly unknown in south-eastern England. Now, that is in itself a sufficiently strange and remarkable fact, but it becomes a thousand times more strange and remarkable if we remember that the slab was brought thither, without any advanced mechanical appliances,

by the stone-age folk. To transport a big block of the sort from the very nearest point where it could possibly be obtained—namely, from North Wales—would tax even at the present day the resources of civilisation as understood by the modern contractor and his myrmidons aforesaid. (I call the navvies myrmidons as often as possible, on purpose to annoy the writers of superfine English.) The mass would have to be carted from the quarry to Dolgelly station, shunted at Ruabon, transferred from the Great Western to the South Western at Swindon, transported to Salisbury, unloaded on to a truck, and then driven across country by a doubtful road on to the bare bosom of Salisbury Plain. And all that after Macadam and Stephenson have wreaked their worst upon the communications of the United Kingdom.

But when the half-naked stone-age folk carried their sacred symbol to its home at Stonehenge, Great Britain must have been a very disunited kingdom indeed. Long ages after, when Cæsar first landed at Deal, for the distress of all subsequent generations of archæologists and schoolboys, it was still divided among Icenians and Coritanians, Catyeuchlanians and Trinobants, and half-a-dozen more assorted unpronounceable Celtic tribes. Much more, then, in the dim recess of neolithic times, must countless petty principalities, like those of South Africa or New Guinea in our own day, have occupied every shire of England, and every Riding in the county of York. If the altar-stone came from Wales, it must have been rolled, tumbled, wheeled, or dragged, over pathless mountains and through trackless plains, guiltless as yet of the wiles of the Macadam, all the way from Carnarvon or Llandeilo to its present position on Salisbury Plain. I do not myself believe, however, for a reason which I will presently state, that the altar-stone is British by origin at all. It came, no doubt, to Wiltshire from a far country, but that country did not lie in the direction of Wales; it lay rather to the extreme east. But, concerning this, more anon.

To add to the wonder, the smaller circles at Stonehenge are also intrusive and of foreign origin, their place of nativity having been as much debated among geological authorities as Homer's or St. Patrick's among the curious in such matters. One thing alone is certain: they are not English, but are naturalised aliens. According to older authorities, they are greenstone from Ireland; and that idea would fit in well with the tradition that the Devil, or Merlin, or somebody else mysterious and unchristian, trans-

ported them hither from the Green Isle. But then, I don't think we need attach much importance to the tradition in this respect, because Ireland, being the Isle of Saints, and the Isle of Druids, and the magical, mystical country generally, was a good place to bring anything mysterious from, just as India and Egypt are at the present day to our own Blavatskys and spiritualists and theosophists. Professor Ramsay, on the other hand, without positively identifying the smaller circles with any British rock, observes that the blocks are of the same nature as the igneous masses in some parts of the Cambrian region in South Wales; and this would fit in pretty well with the theory of the Welsh origin of the altar-stone. But still later inquirers, venturing to look away from Britain altogether, have suggested that the stones may have come from Belgium or some other part of the Continent, where they find rocks still more closely resembling the Stonehenge specimens than any purely British igneous masses. This suggestion appears to me, from the archaeological point of view, far the most probable; and on the following grounds.

Whoever put up the altar-stone and the smaller circles at Stonehenge, must certainly have brought them from a great distance. Now, people don't usually carry about large blocks of greenstone or felspar in their waistcoat pockets, without a good reason; especially if they don't wear waistcoats, and if the blocks are as big as a good-sized doorstep. Hence, I think, we may conclude that the imported stones at Stonehenge were originally sacred: in short, that they were the Lares and Penates of some intrusive conquering tribe, which carried them along with it, like pious *Aeneas*, through all its wanderings. All over the world, upright slabs or menhirs form common objects of worship to savage or barbaric people; the poor heathen, as we were universally informed in the nursery, bow down in their blindness to stocks and stones. These stones are in the most literal sense mere blocks—rude shapeless masses which it would be desecration to carve or cut with a knife, even if the unsophisticated savage happened to possess any proper knife wherewith to cut them. In India, to this day, our Aryan brother sets up just such unhewn stones in the centre of his agricultural holding, to represent the Five Brethren of the old Hindoo mythology. But, as a rule, I believe, the unhewn sacred stone is really a tombstone; it is the upright pillar or menhir, erected originally on top of a barrow, to mark the spot where a great chief or king has once been buried. Offerings are daily

made at the stone by the grateful or terrified descendants, to appease the ancestral ghost ; oil and wine (or whatever else the country affords of alcoholic stimulant) are dutifully poured over it ; and all fitting respect is paid to the grave of the mighty dead by the obsequious survivors. In process of time, however, the object of the worship gets gradually forgotten ; the ghost itself fades away, and it is the actual stone that comes to be regarded as sacred, not the tomb or barrow of which the pillar is but the outward and visible symbol.

As soon as the sanctity of the stone has got to be well and firmly established, it will follow that the tribe, on being forced to migrate elsewhere, will take these, its household deities, on the way with it. All migrating tribes, from pious *Æneas* and his Trojans downwards, always carry their paternal gods in their own portmanteaus. And there are numerous cases on record where migrating tribes have actually thus carried in their train their sacred stones. The Scots carried theirs from Ireland to Argyllshire, and when Edward I. conquered them (*pro tem.*) he took it off in turn from Sccone, and placed it in the coronation chair in Westminster Abbey, where that remote relic of pre-historic paganism still figures in the midst of a christianised ceremony. It seems probable, therefore, that in the same way the intrusive foreign stones of Stonehenge were brought to Wiltshire by some invading tribe, as their own fetishes, much as the South Sea Islanders, going about in canoes from one little group of islets to another, carried with them their own sacred stones to serve as the nucleus of a national religion in the lands whither winds or waves might drift them.

But why may not the newer stone-age men who built Stonehenge have come to Wiltshire from Wales or Ireland ? Simply because the chances are against it ; in Britain at least, the wave of conquest has always gone in the opposite direction. Westward the tide of empire takes its way. The conquerors, like the wise men, come always from the East. It is as improbable that the Stonehenge folk came from Carnarvon or from Wicklow to Wiltshire, as that the founders of New York, Philadelphia, and Boston came from Chicago, St. Louis, or San Francisco to the Atlantic seaboard. The possessor of the plains of England and the lowlands of Scotland has often conquered the Welshman, the Highlander, and the Irishman, but he has never once been conquered by the mountaineers in return.

Taffy was a Welshman, Taffy was a thief,
Taffy came to my house and stole a leg of beef;

but Taffy never dreamt of attempting to overrun the shires of the Midland and the pastures of the south. When Tougal descended on the lowlands, his utmost exploit was to 'drive ta cattle,' as in the familiar instance of the immortal Phairshton. On the other hand the possessors of the English plain have often been conquered and driven back or subdued: first, the Euskarian by the Celt, then the Celt by the Roman, then the romanised Briton in turn by the Saxon, then the Saxon once more by his still heathen brother, the stalwart Dane, or his half-christianised and frenchified cousin, the Norman; but in every case the conquering people came, without one exception, from the continent of Europe. Never once in Britain has the man of the mountains beaten the man of the plains; he takes his tardy revenge by charging the intrusive Saxon in the pass of Llanberis or the strategic defile of Killiecrankie alone. If you fail to catch the point of this last remark, you are recommended to go thither and see, when its hidden meaning will become immediately apparent to the meanest understanding.

Since, then, most conquering people come to Britain from the continent of Europe, since such people are apt in early stages of culture to carry with them, in the rough, their country's gods, and since rocks capable of producing the raw material of the particular deities now in question are better found on the Continent than in Britain, I think we may conclude, with great probability, that the builders of Stonehenge came to Wiltshire from somewhere south-eastward; especially as a broad belt of land at that time still connected the opposite shores of Dover and Calais, and rendered the proposals for a Channel tunnel at once premature and practically unnecessary. I don't doubt that for the stone-age men it was a mere walk-over, and that they carried weight in the shape of the altar-stone and the smaller pillars.

When they got to Salisbury Plain, I take it, they called a halt, and began to set up afresh the standing stones they had carried with them on their long journey. Under the altar-stone, perhaps, the actual *Aeneas* of the stone-age colonists, flying from some early pre-historic Agamemnon, was duly buried at last by his own people. Certainly, some interment or other took place upon the spot; for when an iconoclastic lord of the manor, in the days of the Stuarts, went digging among the hoar stones in search

of treasure—vulgar-minded wretch ! he was rewarded only by the discovery of a few old bones, stags' horns, bullocks' heads, and other wonted memorials of a primitive neolithic funeral feast. Having set up their fetish stones in due order, however, the pious immigrants determined to add to the dignity and glory of their national temple by piling up around it a circle of the tallest and biggest grey wethers that all Wiltshire could readily produce. These grey wethers they dressed roughly with their polished flint axes into rudely quadrangular shape, piled them up by two and two, and then lifted by main force a third on top, so as to form the familiar shape of the existing trilithons. Thus it is the smaller stones of Stonehenge that form the really most ancient and important part of the whole erection. The other portion of that great pre-historic temple, the huge trilithons that astonish us still, even in this age of advanced engineering, by their bulk and massiveness, have grown up around the lesser and more sacred obelisks, much as the magnificent church of Our Lady of Loretto has grown up about the Casa Santa of Nazareth, which was miraculously transported through the air from Palestine, like Stonehenge from Ireland by the arts of Merlin.

It is probable that the greater part of the biggest Sarsen stones were employed at one time for just such purposes as at Stonehenge—dolmens, cromlechs, chambered barrows, and so forth—and thus they got to be mentally identified by the rustic intelligence, not, it is true, with Druids (for the Druidical nonsense, like Arkite worship and all the rest of it, is a pure invention of the ‘learned’ or pedantic classes), but with some old forgotten heathen worship. Hence they were commonly spoken of as Saracen stones ; and the name was justified by the common belief that the architects of Stonehenge, in carting the great blocks to their present position, had tumbled some of them about on the downs. Within the memory of men still living, a fair was held at one such pre-historic monument, and was opened by solemnly pouring a bottle of port over the sacred fetish of a race long since passed away from among us. Could anything prove more conclusively the persistence of custom in an old settled and very mixed population ? Celt and Roman and Saxon and Norman have since come, and many of them gone again ; but the heathen rites offered up at the grave of some dimly remembered Euskanian chieftain survived through them all up to the very beginning of this enlightened nineteenth century.

COURT ROYAL.

A STORY OF CROSS CURRENTS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF 'JOHN HERRING,' 'MEHALAH,' ETC.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A SISTER OF MERCY.



HE brothers of the Duke, his son and daughter, hurried to his apartment in alarm. The Worthivales, father and son, remained where they were, anxious to know the cause of alarm, but unwilling to intrude.

The Archdeacon turned faint; he also suffered from the heart, and the Marquis was obliged to lend him an arm. The General and Lady Grace were the first to enter the Duke's morning sitting-room.

We must explain the cause of the Duke's excitement.

He had been taking his breakfast when the valet informed him that a lady

—a Sister of Mercy—had called and desired very particularly to see his Grace, if he would generously allow her an interview of five minutes.

'A Sister of Mercy!' exclaimed the Duke. 'What—Thompson, in the hall. Kept her waiting?—Excellent people—most certainly I will see her. Some subscription wanted to an orphanage, or a refuge, or a laundry. Show her up at once—of course, of course.'

A lady entered in black, closely veiled.

'Take a chair, my dear madam,' said the Duke, rising.
'Thompson, put a chair. That will do. Pray be seated, madam.'

'Thank your Grace,' said the Sister, waiting till the valet had left the room; 'I had rather stand. I will not detain you five minutes.'

'No detention at all, except as a pleased captive,' said the Duke. 'It does an old worthless fellow like me, shelved from all useful work, good to see one whose life is devoted to doing deeds of charity, to care and toil for others. The Sister of Mercy sums up in her little self the whole duty of man, as a proverb condenses the experience of ages.'

'Your Grace must excuse me. I do no deeds of charity. I owe no duties to my fellows. I am not a Sister. I am a nobody. I am only Joanna.' She threw back her veil. The Duke looked at her with mingled surprise and admiration; surprise, because he did not understand her words, admiration at her beauty.

'You have not heard of me,' said Joanna. 'I do not suppose you have; but I know about you, and I know more concerning your affairs than do you yourself. I dressed in this disguise to come here, because I did not wish the servants to recognise and stop me. I determined to see your Grace. I am only a small mouse, and you a great lion, but you are fallen into a net, and I can bite the threads and free you.'

'You must excuse me, Miss Joanna—but I really do not see your drift, and understand to what I owe the honour of this visit.' The Duke put his hand to his head.

'Your Grace is in the hands of Jews.' Joanna opened a little handbag, and threw some deeds on the table. 'Look there—the mortgages my master holds. I have taken them. I bring them to you. Tear them up and burn them, and Lazarus cannot touch you. I am with Lazarus. I would have allowed myself to be hacked to pieces rather than hurt him, but he dealt falsely by me. He sent me here to pry into and discover for him your affairs. Lord Saltcombe and Lady Grace have been kind to me. I will not help to bring them down. I will show them that I am grateful. I love—I dearly love Lady Grace.'

'My good Miss Joanna,' said the Duke, 'I am perplexed beyond measure. I cannot understand—'

'Those deeds will explain all,' said Joanna, interrupting him. 'I have not many minutes to spare. I have come here from

Plymouth, and must return whilst my master is absent. All lies in a nutshell. There are your mortgages. Destroy them.'

'I cannot touch them,' said the Duke. 'Do you mean to tell me that you have abstracted them from the holder?'

'Yes, I took them from his strong box.'

'You have acted very wrongly. You have committed a crime. You are liable to be tried for this and imprisoned. This is robbery.'

'I do not care. I want to do something for Lady Grace. I am the Jew's heir, and if I steal the money I rob myself. There is no harm in that. Besides, he used me unfairly in sending me here, and I will pay him out for it.'

'You must go back at once and replace these documents where you found them.'

'You will not destroy them?'

'Most certainly not.'

'But I will tear them to shreds.'

'That will not relieve me. I am morally bound by them. I should meet my liabilities just the same whether the deeds existed or were destroyed. I hold their counterparts, and will act on them. There—child—take them back, and never, never again act in so rash a manner. Your motives may be good, but your conduct has been most reprehensible.'

'Your Grace does not know all. The truth is kept from you. Ask Lord Saltcombe, ask Lord Ronald, to tell you the truth. Or there—look at this Society paper. There is a paragraph in it about you. My master put it in, and was paid for the information. No—do not look at it till I am gone. I tell you that you are ruined, and the world knows it now. Your last hope was in the marriage of Lord Saltcombe, and that is taken from you. Will you have the mortgages?'

'Certainly, certainly not,' said the Duke, uneasy, offended, bewildered. He could not understand who Joanna was, why she addressed him, what her interest in him was, and his pride was hurt at her offer, at her daring to talk of his embarrassments to his face.

'And really,' he continued, after a pause, 'I am at a loss to explain this visit; though I feel flattered that my family, or any members in it, should have inspired—'

Joanna again interrupted him. 'Your Grace, my time is precious. I must be off. I have made you the offer, and you

have refused it. I can do no more. There is the paper. I have marked the paragraph with blue pencil.'

She thrust the deeds back in her bag, and, before the Duke had put his hand to the bell, left the room.

The Duke sat for some moments, rubbing his brow, trying to gather his thoughts. The visit was so short, Joanna's manner so extraordinary, her offer so outrageous, that the old man was completely thrown out of his usual train by it. He shook his head and took up the Society paper. His eye was caught at once by the paragraph Joanna had pencilled. It was to the effect that the projected marriage between the Marquis of S——, heir to the most embarrassed Duke in the three kingdoms, and the daughter of a wealthy planter from the East Indies, was broken off owing to the ruinous condition of the Duke's affairs, and to the fact that the father of the lady declined to allow his hard-won savings to be thrown away in washing the Duke's hands. The editor added that it was satisfactory to know that some birds were sufficiently old not to be caught with *Salt!*

The state of excitement into which reading this threw the Duke alarmed Thompson, and he ran to summon aid. Mrs. Probus, on hearing that the Duke was ill, ordered one of the grooms to ride for the doctor, a hot bath to be got ready, a couple of bricks to be put into the kitchen fire for application to his Grace's soles, and to direct that spirits and cordials should be taken at once to the Duke's apartment.

When the General entered, followed by Lady Grace, he found Lucy already by the chair of the old man, vainly endeavouring to pacify him. The Duke tried to speak, but words failed him. He held the newspaper and waved it impatiently, and pointed to it with the other hand. Lucy had a glass of water, and entreated him to drink it, but he shook his head angrily.

Then the Archdeacon came in, leaning on Lord Salcombe's arm.

'What is it? What is the matter? Is it a fit?' he asked.
'Bathe his temples with vinegar, give him sal volatile. The action of the heart must be stimulated.'

The Duke was irritated at the attempts to doctor him with cold water and compresses, with vinegar and cordials. After a moment of struggle he gasped forth, 'Take this trash away. I am not ill. I am insulted. Get along with you, Thompson. Turn the servants out. I don't want all the world here.—Please



leave my chair, Lucy.—Grace, I had rather you were not in the room. What have you all come tumbling in on me for in this fashion? I am not dying. The room is not in flames. I pray you—leave me alone with my brothers.'

'Please let me stay by you, papa,' said Lady Grace.

He made an impatient gesture with his head, but she would take no denial. She stepped back behind his chair, and Lucy left the room.

When the Duke saw that he had only his son and brothers before him, he recovered himself, and, holding out the paper, exclaimed, 'I have been insulted—grossly insulted. Look at this!'

The Archdeacon took the paper from his hand, and read it.

'What is it, Edward?' asked the General.

'Hand him the paper, Edward, when you have done reading the precious production. What do you think it dares—actually dares to say? Upon my word, the temerity of the press is inconceivable. It has the audacity to declare that we are ruined; that I—I, the Duke of Kingsbridge, am living on the forbearance of my creditors. Bless my soul! where are the lightnings of heaven, that they do not flash on heads that dare think, and tongues and hands that dare speak and write, such outrages?'

The General turned white and looked down. The Archdeacon folded the paper with trembling hands, and laid it on the table.

'I wish,' said Lord Ronald, 'that the old times were back, when I might call the editor out and put a pistol-shot through his head.'

'That cannot be. It is impossible now. A gentleman cannot redress a wrong,' said the Duke. 'If he takes a horsewhip and touches a dog that has snarled at him, he has to endure the indignity of being summoned for assault. You have not read the paragraph, Ronald. You had better not. It will fire your blood, and you will be committing some indiscretion. It dares to insinuate that we sent the Marquis hunting that girl for her money wherewith to buy off our creditors and secure prolongation of days to ourselves.'

Lord Ronald was too confused to speak, his temples became spotted red. He took the paper and read it.

'What has occasioned this?' asked his Grace. 'Is it possible that gossip is at work upon us—groundless gossip? Who

has started it? How far has it gone? I know well enough that our fortunes are not as magnificent as they were in the reigns of the first Georges, and that the property is encumbered, but that is all. What is the meaning of this calumny starting to life?

The Archdeacon looked at the Marquis, but as the General and Lord Saltcombe looked at him—the mainstay of the family—he answered, ‘Do not put yourself out, Duke. There is no accounting for the origin and progress of tittle-tattle. It springs out of nothing, and swells to portentous size on nothing.’

‘But, Edward, it kills like the fluke in the sheep. That also springs from an imperceptible nothing, but its effects are felt, not by the sheep only, but by the farmer, the landowner, and the parson. A germ of microscopic smallness disturbs the social system; no rents, no tithe, no trade.’

‘Of course there are mortgages and debts,’ said the Archdeacon.

‘Of course there are,’ exclaimed the Duke. ‘There always have been. What landed estate is unencumbered? But what of that? Every oak bears oak-apples as well as acorns.’

‘Put the paper in the fire,’ said Lord Ronald, ‘and its contents out of your mind.’

‘The one is done more easily than the other,’ answered the Duke. ‘Indeed, the one is possible, the other is not; a bullet may be extracted, but the wound remains to ache and fester. But are things in a bad state here—so bad, I mean?’ He turned to the Marquis. ‘Saltcombe,’ he said, ‘since I have been ill you have had the charge of everything. I hope you have done your duty, and can answer to the point when I ask, is there occasion for this impertinence?’ The Marquis hesitated. He was afraid of alarming his father; he could not dissemble. Whilst he hesitated Lady Grace stepped forward, knelt down at her father’s feet, and leaning her hands on his knees, whilst she looked up fearlessly into his eyes, said, ‘Papa, we are quite wrong in regarding you as too weak to bear bad news. You are a rock, and can stand the storm as well as the sunshine, is it not so? Well, dearest papa, it is quite true we are ruined. We do not know where to turn for money. The mortgagees are calling in their mortgages. There is nothing for it but to sell some of the property.’ She paused, then turned with a smile to her uncles. ‘There,’ she said, ‘see how brave the dear old man is! how erect

the silver head is held! He is no coward; he is not afraid to hear the truth, however dreadful the truth may be.'

The Duke was flattered. He bent forward and kissed his daughter on her brow. Then he leaned back in his chair, and looked from one to another. 'She exaggerates, no doubt.'

'It is too true, father,' said the Marquis, 'we have got into almost inextricable confusion. Still—there is hope. Worthivale



is going to write to the troublesome mortgagees, and arrange for a delay.'

'Worthivale should never have allowed things to come to this pass. But I see exactly how it is. Worthivale is an alarmist, excellent fellow though he be. He is always crying out that there is no money for anything, and it has become a habit with him to hold up his hands and eyes in despair. He has persuaded himself that we are ruined, and you have been weak enough to listen to

him and believe all he says. I know why he is crying out now. He is scared at the idea of my buying Revelstoke. You may tell him that I give it up; thereupon his sky will be set with a triple rainbow.'

'I agree with you,' said Lord Edward. 'Mr. Worthivale has taken his son Beavis into confidence, and the new broom sweeps up a dust. In a little while the dust will settle, and all go on as before.'

'Oh, Beavis!' exclaimed the Duke, 'this is Beavis's cry of wolf, is it?'

'Papa,' said Lady Grace in urgent tones, 'when the wolf did come the cry was disregarded.'

'Do not you meddle in these matters, my pretty,' said the Duke. 'It was cruel of them to disturb your mind with these false alarms. You should live above all sordid money cares. Go back to your flowers.' Then turning to the others: 'Worthivale is a good man of business, he will manage all.'

'But, papa,' said Lady Grace, 'how came you to get this wicked paper? Was it sent you by post?'

'No, dear. I received a call this morning from a lady, a Sister of Mercy, and she left it.'

'What! a Sister of Mercy read a Society paper!'

'Yes—I suppose so—even a Sister of Mercy—that is—but, upon my word, I am so bewildered; I hardly know who she really was. I rather incline to think she was a maniac.'

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

REFORMATION.

SINCE Joanna's return from Court Royal Lodge a change for the better had been effected in the house of the Golden Balls. She had been firm with Lazarus, and he had yielded. She kept everything in good order; she refused peremptorily to have the kitchen and what belonged to the housekeeping department untidy and broken. She got white lime, mixed it herself, and with a pawned mason's brush whitewashed the kitchen, the back kitchen, and her own attic bedroom. She mixed yellow ochre with the wash and coloured the walls. Where the slates in the floor were broken, she relaid them herself in cement of her own mixing. She

stitched some muslin and made a blind for her window. She scrubbed the shelves and table in the kitchen with pumice-stone and soda, till the white deal shone like new. When work for the day was over, she laid a rug before the kitchen fire, brought the tea-table before it, threw over it a cloth, and put on it her lamp. She seated herself beside the stove, with the door open, so that the red light flickered over her knees and skirt, and white stockings and neat shoes, whilst the lamp irradiated her face and hands, intent and engaged on needlework.

Joanna had always been an energetic worker, never idle, but her work hitherto had been unsystematic, undirected, desultory ; it was like her conscience, unsystematic, undirected, spasmodic in action. She had done what came to hand, and done it as the light of nature taught her. At Court Royal Lodge she had seen order, cleanliness, reduced to clockwork. She had learned that comfort was inseparable from both. Her feminine instinct for what is seemly and right was satisfied, and she was resolved, with the whole strength of her strong will, to reform the domestic arrangements at the Golden Balls.

She had several battles with Lazarus, but she was victorious along the line. The meals were better. He had made himself ill by the nastiness of the food he had eaten whilst she was away, and he was ready to yield a point in this particular, on her return, for his own health's sake. She did not openly oppose him when she found she could carry her purpose by quiet persistence.

When in Plymouth—at his private money-lending office, at which he was present for some hours in the day, an office without name on the door or window, quite a private lodging, to all appearance—he was well dressed, that is in respectable clothes, without patches, without splits, not discoloured. On his return he dived at once into his bedroom, and re-emerged, the wretchedest of old ragmen. ‘It is in eating, Joanna, that clothes get spoiled. If we were angels, neither eating nor drinking, our clothes would never wear out. With the utmost care we cannot avoid speckling and splashing the cloth.’

‘Where are my house clothes ?’ he asked one day, putting his head—only his head—out at the door. ‘I can’t find them anywhere, and I’ve been hunting for them high and low. I’ll catch my death of cold. Have you taken them to darn ? Tell me. I am all of a shiver.’

'I did take them,' said Joanna; 'but they are not fit for you to put on.'

'Oh, for the matter of that, this is home, sweet home, and anything will do there. Joanna, be a dearie, and walk backwards with them, and pass them in at the door whilst I hold it ajar.'

'I can't—I've sold them.'

'Sold them!' cried the Jew. 'Sold the very skin off my back! Oh, Joanna, I hope you had a good offer for them.'

'I sold them as old rags, three pounds for a penny. There were not many pounds in them; you had worn them threadbare.'

'Oh, Joanna! what am I to do? Where is the money?'

She came towards the door.

'I have it in my hand.'

He uttered a little scream, and drew in his head and shut the door. 'Pass it under. Brrr! it is dreadfully raw! What am I to do for clothes?'

She stood outside, and heard him counting the coppers.

'Very little, wretchedly little,' he muttered. 'You might almost as well have thrown the things away.'

'That would have been against the principles on which I have been reared—never do anything for nothing.'

'True doctrine,' said the Jew, 'I was speaking poetically. I strew flowers sometimes. It is my mind—ornate.'

Presently he called very loud, 'Joanna! I say, Joanna!'

'Well,' she answered, 'what do you want?'

'I'm quivering like gold-leaf,' he said plaintively through the door; 'I can't come out as I am.'

'Put on again the suit you went out in.'

'But I want my tea.'

'What of that?'

'It may drip. And bread and butter.'

'Well?'

'The little bits with butter on them may fall on my knees butter downwards, and stain me.'

'I've made you a sort of blouse,' said Joanna through the key-hole, 'in which you can be respectable. You can slip it over your suit when you come in.'

'But the seat, Joanna; the wear and tear there is sickening.'

'I've cushioned your chair,' she replied through the key-hole.

After a while Lazarus appeared, respectably dressed. Then the girl produced a smock she had made, and he drew it over his head.

'I look rustic in it,' he said; 'but I see the idea—it will save clothes. I approve.'

The kitchen looked cosy with the lamp and fire, the hearth-rug, the tablecloth, and the tea-things, and with the curtain drawn.

'It is beautiful, but expensive,' said Lazarus. 'Dear heart alive! you are burning the coals very fast.'

'I've reckoned up, and find it cheapest to have a good fire,' answered Joanna, 'cheaper by sevenpence three farthings per night.'

'How do you make that out?' asked the Jew. 'I'd be proud to know how spending can be converted into saving.'

'I worked one night without fire,' said Joanna in reply. 'I worked at the coat-turning, and my fingers were so cold I could hardly hold the needle, and had to put them in my mouth to bring the feeling into them. The next evening I worked with fire, the same number of hours, at the same sort of work, and did half as much again with warm fingers. Then I ciphered it all up—so much done at so many hours, and coals, by measure, at fourteen shillings per ton, and I reckon I cleared sevenpence three farthings.'

'Seven times eight makes fifty-six. Twelves in fifty-six, four and eight over. Seven farthings, one and three over. Penny three farthings from four-and-eight makes a total of four-and-sixpence farthing. Say twelve weeks of firing, that makes—twelve times four, forty-eight; twelve times six, six shillings: forty-eight and six make fifty-two. Why, Joanna, that is the clearing of two pounds twelve and threepence per annum. At that rate you may burn coals and I will not grumble.'

'There is nothing like thrift, is there, master?'

'Ah,' said the Jew, 'talk of the beauties of nature! What I look to is the moral lessons it preaches. How many of your holiday-takers, who run over the sea cliffs, look at the thrift that covers them, and lay the flower to heart? I'm not one who approves of hoarding. Hoarding is a low and savage virtue, but Turning over is the cultured virtue. Turn your eggs and they don't addle, but they won't set. It is better with moneys. You can always restore the vital heat to them in your pocket, turn them over, and hatch out of them a pretty brood.'

Lazarus spread his hands before the fire, and the light played over his face. He smiled with satisfaction.

'The domestic circle,' said he to himself, or Joanna, or both, 'is a very pleasant circle to him who is its centre. I only passed through it as the man in the circus goes through a hoop, and mine was on fire, and singed me. Nevertheless, I won't say but ——'

He did not finish his sentence, and Joanna did not trouble herself to inquire what he intended to say.

'I think a shave wouldn't do you harm,' she observed. 'There is a frowsy growth on your upper lip like a neglected plantation.'

'I'm going to grow a moustache,' said the Jew. 'I'm about to mark an epoch with it.'

'You—you going to make yourself ridiculous?'

'Not at all ridiculous. I've come to that period of life when a judicious growth of hair disguises the ravages of time.'

'Pray, what is the epoch to be marked by a moustache?' asked the girl.

Instead of answering the question directly, he sighed, stretched his legs and arms, and said, 'I'm a lone, lorn widower.'

'That ought not to trouble you much,' observed Joanna. 'You've been a grass widower long enough.'

'That is just it, Joanna,' said the Jew; 'I've been in grass so long that I should like now to get into clover.'

'Do you think of retiring from business?' asked the girl.

'Oh dear no! I couldn't live without it.'

'Then you will allow me to spend more on housekeeping?'

He shook his head and hitched his shoulders uneasily. 'I'm not inclined to launch out far yet,' he said, with an intonation on the last word. 'The time will soon come when it will be otherwise. I am going to foreclose on those Kingsbridge people. What is more, I've been about and seen some of the other mortgagees, and given them such a scare that I've no doubt they will do the same. I've got it into the society papers, Joanna—published to the world that the great ironclad Duke is foundering. The beauty of my position is that I strike at the heart. I have my hold on Court Royal itself. They will sell anything rather than that; and if they once begin to sell, it will go like a forest on fire—there will be no stopping it.'

'They will be beyond your reach when the marriage takes place,' said Joanna.

'I have put a spoke in that wheel. The marriage is broken off.'

Joanna was sincerely distressed. 'I wish I had done nothing for you. I wish—I wish I had not!'

'You have done everything for me,' said Lazarus. 'Through you I have ascertained who are the mortgagees, and who hold the bills, and I have been able to see and scare them all. Even the insurance company, that has the heaviest mortgage of all, is made uneasy. You may depend upon it, I have taken the pillars between my arms, and brought down the house upon the Philistines.'

Joanna burst into tears.

'There, there,' said the Jew, 'you have been dazzled and bewitched by those aristocrats, like so many others. It is a short enchantment that will soon pass. Joanna, we will have a bloater for supper. Eh? soft roe! eh?'

Joanna held down her head, and the tears dropped on the work on which she was engaged. Lazarus looked at her with a peculiar expression in his eyes. Then he began to whistle plaintively to himself Azucena's song in 'Trovatore,' 'Homeward returning to our green mountain.'

Presently the girl looked up, saw him watching her, and something in his expression offended her, for she coloured, and said, 'I did not know you were musical.'

'I'm what you may call a many-sided man,' answered the Jew, 'full of prismatic twinkle and colour. You've only seen me under one aspect, and that the business one—appraising goods, whacking little boys, and scolding you. But there is more in me than you suppose. You've thought me hard, may be, but I'm like a sirloin of beef—I have my tender undercut. You've thought me cold, because I'm not given to blaze and crackle with emotion and sentiment, but I'm a slow combustion stove, lined with firebrick, and when alight I give out a lot of heat for my size. There are some men like the greengage—all sweetness without, but the heart within is stony. There are others like the walnut, rugged and hard as to their exterior, but nutty and white and delicious when you get at their insides. Such, Joanna, am I.'

'I've never tasted the nuttiness yet,' said the girl.

'But it is there.' He shook his head. 'Wait till my moustache is grown, and that Kingsbridge pack of cards is tossed about, and you'll see wonders.'

'I want to see no more of you than I am forced to,' she muttered.

'Oh, Joanna, don't say that! I suppose now, taking all in all, that you have got a certain amount of liking for me.'

'What do you mean by "taking all in all"? Do you mean taking your heap of greasy, patched clothes, and your frowsy face, and your long and dirty finger-nails, and your stingy habits, and the way you smack your lips over food that is palatable, and the way in which you are ogling me now—taking all this together I have a liking for you? No, nothing of the kind.'

'Why do you say these offensive things, Joanna? We belong to each other like a pair of stockings; one can't go on without the other.'

'I think I could shift without you,' said Joanna. 'There is the bell; some one is at the door.'

A moment after Charles Cheek's voice was heard in the passage.

'Is the boss in? I want to see him. Not but what I wanted to see you also, Joanna; but that is a permanent craving.'

'Here is Mr. Lazarus,' said the girl, ushering the young man into the kitchen. 'I've put him on a smock to keep him respectable.'

'What do you want with me?' asked Lazarus, with lowering brow and without a salutation.

'This is a civil reception, is it not?' exclaimed the young man. 'What else can I want of you but money? I am cleaned out, and desire accommodation till my father relaxes. He is out of humour just now, and will send me no more than my allowance. As if a young fellow of spirit could live within his allowance!'

'Why did you not come to my office at a proper time?' asked Lazarus, almost rudely.

'Because money-lending and money-taking are proper to you at all times.'

'I can let you have no more. You have had abundance, and I shall lose what I have lent already.'

'How much is that?'

'I cannot tell till I have looked.'

'Well, go and see.'

Lazarus rose reluctantly from his chair, and taking a candle, lit it at the fire and went to his room. When Joanna saw that he was gone she drew near to Charles Cheek, and looking up in his

face with a grave expression said, ‘Do not come here after money. Lazarus will ruin you.’

‘But I must have money. If my father will not find it, I must obtain it elsewhere.’

‘When did you see your father last?’

‘A century ago.’

‘Why do you see him so seldom?’

‘Because I am not partial to lectures on extravagance.’

‘You deserve them. Go to your father; tell him the truth; promise him to be more prudent.’

‘No use, Joanna. I cannot be prudent. It is not in me. I must spend, just as the sun emits light and the musk fragrance.’

‘Neither of these exhausts itself. You must not, you must not, indeed, come to Lazarus. I know how this works. In seven years I ought to know. It brings inevitably to ruin, and I would not have you come to that.’

‘Why not, Joey?’

‘Because I like you, Charlie.’

Both laughed. His impertinence had been met and cast back in his face.

‘Upon my word, Joanna, I wish you could take me in hand and manage me; then something might be made out of me.’

‘I cannot take that responsibility on me. I turn coats, not those who wear them. But I can advise you. I do entreat you to listen to me. I speak because you have been kind to me, and I do not meet with so much kindness as to be indifferent to those who show it me. I would like to see you out of Lazarus’s books. You can give him no security—only your note of hand. Do you consider what interest he takes on that? There—go home, see your father, tell him what you want; make no promises if you are too weak to keep them.’

‘I wish you would let me come here sometimes and ask you what I am to do when in a hobble. You have brains.’

‘Do what I ask you now, and you may. It is vain to expect help if you will not follow advice.’

‘Upon my word,’ said the young man, ‘I wish it were possible for me to make you Mrs. Charlie Cheek, and then, maybe, you would be able to make a man of me.’

‘Not possible,’ said Joanna.

‘Why not?’

‘The material is not present out of which to make a man.’

Then both laughed, but Charles Cheek laughed constrainedly, and coloured. She had cut him to the quick, but the cut did him good. He was a kindly, easy-disposed young man, without guile, marred by bad bringing up. He had one rare and excellent quality: he was humble and knew his own shortcomings. Joanna was wrong. With that, the making of a man was in him. Had he been conceited, it would not.

'How much do you want?' asked Lazarus, entering. He had heard them laugh, and supposed they had made a joke about him.

'Nothing,' answered the young man. 'I have changed my mind. I'll try my father again before I come to you, Bloodsucker!'

CHAPTER XXXIX.

OVER A SNAIL.

'WELL, Joe, flourishing?'

'Middling, Charlie.'

Joanna was seated in the shop of the Golden Balls next day behind the counter, engaged on her needlework, when Charles Cheek came in, and swung the door behind him, so that it clashed and jarred the glass.

'You must not be violent,' said Joanna, 'or the breakages will go down to your bill along with the silk gown and the necklace. Why have you not gone to your father as you promised?'

'I am ashamed to appear before him,' answered young Cheek. 'If I tell him the truth he will kick me out of the house, and not pay my return ticket.'

'Do you want a large sum?'

'I lost my money in a way I daren't confess. My governor is a man of a practical turn of mind, and will insist on particulars. I am bad at invention, and if I begin to tell lies he will find me out, and be down on me like the steam-hammer at the docks!'

'Then tell him the truth. That always answers, for no one believes it.'

'I cannot. The case is too gross. This did it.' He drew a snail-shell from his pocket, and set it on the counter. 'Will you deal with me for this article? It is a curiosity, and a costly one. It cost me a hundred pounds.'

Joanna took up the snail-shell, and turned it about, then put it

down contemptuously. ‘There is nothing particular about this shell except its size.’

‘Yes, there is. She is a racer. I lost a hundred pounds on her. I cannot tell my father that. I was proud of my snail, too, and now she is either dead or sulky. She has not put out her head since I lost my money on her.’

‘How did you manage that?’

‘By racing, I tell you.’ Charles Cheek jumped on the counter and seated himself on it, close to Joanna.

‘Will you take a chair?’ she asked.

‘No, thank you. This is my only chance of getting you to look up to me. I am going to tell you about my snail.’ He thrust the shell before her. ‘Do look at this beast. She has lost me a hundred pounds.’

Joanna continued sewing, without looking off her work.

‘Joe,’ he said, ‘what do you think of that?’

‘I had rather be the snail than you.’

‘I will tell you how it was. Captain Finch and I have played a good deal together of late at billiards, and we have also raced our snails. His is a very good runner. His regiment is under orders for India; so we resolved to have a final trial between our snails for double or quits. Mine started right enough, but became lazy, and I touched her. When I did that, the snail, instead of running the faster, retreated within her shell. I was frightened, and applied the lighted end of my cigar to the shell. She ought to have rushed out, but, instead, went into sulks. She has not put out her horns since. Joe, you ought to sympathise with me and help me; I had christened my racer after you.’

‘My name is not Joe.’

‘My snail was called Joanna.’

‘Why did you name a snail after me? It was no compliment.’

‘I called her after the jolliest girl I knew. I had to give her a name, and I could think only of you at the time. I can’t tell my governor the story of the snail, can I? Invent me something to take its place.’

Joanna shook her head. ‘I cannot do that,’ she said gravely; ‘I never tell a lie to Lazarus. If ever I see my mother again, I will be true to her in every word I utter. You must be true to your father. Whom can we be true to except our own parents? As for the public —her lips curled with scorn—‘there is no sin in

lying to them. They love lies as rats love aniseed. Put your snail in water, and she'll put out her head.'

'I never thought of that. Give me a saucer and water, and we will try. I dare say she is as dry as a sermon.'

Joanna complied with his request. No customer came into the shop just then ; had one come, he would have seen two young



heads bowed over a saucer with a little water in it, watching a snail. The one head was fair, the other dark ; the one face good-natured, feeble, the other full of character and intelligence. Both pleasant in appearance ; the young man good-looking, the girl beautiful ; he with almost boyish simplicity, she with womanly shrewdness.

'She is stirring, by Jove !' exclaimed Charlie Cheek.

'I said she would. I am never mistaken.'

'It was a case of double or quits,' explained the young man; 'that is how I came to lose so much. There was a matter of fifty pounds between us, so when Finch proposed double or quits on a snail race, I said "Done!"'

'And done you are,' said Joanna. 'The snail was wiser than you. When burnt, she retired from the contest, and you persevered.'

'There comes her head,' exclaimed Cheek.

'Yours is to come,' said Joanna.

'Don't be hard on me, Joe; I shall get bad words enough from my father. He is a rough man, and lets his tongue play, and his tongue is a lash of iron. I confess to you—I would to no one else—I am ashamed of myself; I am too weak. I can't say No to a fellow.'

'You are like the jelly-fish, carried ashore by the tide; where the tide leaves them they lie, and dissolve away into nothing.'

'You are hard on me.'

'Is it not so? A man should have backbone or he is nothing. I was cast up by the tide, but I am solid.'

'It is easy for you to talk. You have a head. I only wish you were my sister, to be always at my elbow.'

'Last night you lamented that I was not your wife. Which do you mean?'

The young man coloured and fidgeted. He drew his head away; it had been in close proximity to hers, over the saucer.

'Of course I am joking,' he said.

'What, now, or last night?' She laughed, then said, 'See! I have frightened you by pretending to take your words as earnest. Do not be alarmed. I do not desire responsibility for a man, in either capacity, who is unable to care for himself.'

'But—Joanna! this shall be my last folly. I solemnly swear it. You are the only person I know who has spoken plainly to me—except my father, and he makes me mad, he hurts me. If ever I am disposed to give way when I ought to be firm, I'll remember the jelly-fish.'

He spoke in a tone of hurt pride and real distress. Joanna put forth her hand and grasped his, whilst her face shone with pleasure. 'That is right,' she said cheerily. 'It does my heart good to hear you speak thus. If you want to give me the greatest of pleasures, it will be to let me know that you have

kept your word, for, in spite of your weakness, I do like you. Moreover, to prove to you that I have confidence in you, I will help you now. You shall have the hundred pounds in a week.'

'How will you get it?' asked the young man. 'Not from Lazarus, surely.'

'No,' she replied, looking grave, 'I would not for the world apply to him to lend it to me.'

'Whence is it to come? Not from your wages, saved?'

'I receive no wages, I am a pawn.'

'A hundred pounds! You will obtain that for me?'

'You shall know about it to-morrow. To-morrow you go to your father.'

'I will go, certainly. How will you find the hundred pounds?'

'Never mind. It shall be done to restore the credit of my name, as the snail bears it.'

'I wish you would tell me how it is to be got.'

'No, you will find out in time. I am not doing this for you, but for the sake of the snail that bears my name.'

'Thank you, Joanna; you said something different when you made the offer. I *must* pay Captain Finch before he sails; a debt of honour is binding and must be paid, a debt to a tradesman may. If I had been unable to find the money, I think I should have destroyed myself.'

'No,' said the girl, shaking her head. 'To do that demands a firmer character than you have got. How would you have done it, pray?'

'I do not know. I dare say I should have jumped into the sea.'

'That is bad,' said Joanna; 'I have tried it.'

'What is good?'

'There must be some easy way of slipping out of life when life becomes unendurable.'

'Oh yes. The simplest of all is laudanum. That sends you to sleep, and you sleep away into the never-ending slumber.'

'Repeat the name.'

'What on earth can you want with laudanum? You are not tired of existence, I suppose?'

Joanna said nothing.

'Oh, look at the snail!' exclaimed the young man. 'She is getting out of the saucer, she is lively again. I might race her again and win back my hundred pounds.'

'No,' said Joanna, 'you have done with these follies. Life is serious, Mr. Cheek. It is a time for making money, not of throwing it away. I wish you had some of the monokeratic principle in you.'

The young man started from the counter, and coloured to the roots of his hair. 'What do you know of that?' he asked sharply. 'I hate the sound, and now it issues from your lips.'

'Why should you hate it? It has been the means of making a fortune.'

'It is a trouble to me. I suppose the officers I associate with know about my father, or I suspect they do, and every allusion to a unicorn cuts into me as if the beast itself were driving its horn between my ribs. There it is, plastered on every hoarding, with the inscription "Try Cheek's Monokeratic System."

'I am sorry to have offended you. I do not see why you should dislike to hear of that which has made you.'

'Wait, Joanna, till you are near the top of the tree, and then the words Golden Balls will drive you frantic.'

'Maybe,' said Joanna, 'though I do not see why it should. But to return to what I was speaking about before you interrupted me. To my thinking you are leading an altogether unworthy life. Life is a time for making money.'

'Only for those born without it,' said the young man. 'My father has amassed a large fortune. It will be mine some day, no doubt. It is hard that I should be limited to a beggarly four hundred per annum. You would not have me make more money. That would indeed be carrying coals to Newcastle.'

'No, but life has other objects for which a man may strive. There is position. Push for that. Your father is not a gentleman, but you can be one.'

'Well, I am working in that direction,' said Charles. 'I associate with officers, play billiards and cards, and ride and smoke and eat with them.'

'And lose money to them on snails.'

'Yes, all conduces to good fellowship. I am friends with those who would not meet my father. I have stepped from the counter to one of the shelves.'

'I am glad your life is not aimless,' said the girl. 'If you are striving for position I can respect you; an aimless life is to me despicable.'

'I cannot say that I have ever thought much about a purpose,'

said Charles Cheek, 'still—I like to be with those who are my social superiors.'

'And sometimes to have a chat with such as me—your social inferior.'

'No doubt about that, Joe.'

'Well, Mr. Cheek, form a purpose, and drive hard after it.'

'Joe!' The young man reseated himself on the counter, in a graver, more meditative mood than was common with him. 'Joe, I should like to have a photograph taken of you. Have you been photographed at any time?'

She shook her head and laughed.

'You are a girl to make a fellow think and try to do better. I should like to have your picture.'

'I have had neither the time nor the money to waste on one,' she answered.

'The money is nothing. Will you shut up shop for half an hour and come with me to the photographer? I will pay the damage.'

'I can close. It is now noon, and no business will be done at dinner-time. But I will consent on one condition only.'

'Any condition you like to make.'

'Let us three be taken in a group.'

'What three? You, Lazarus, and I?'

'No, certainly not. You, I, and the snail.'

'By all means. Immortalise my folly. I also will make a stipulation: will you grant it?'

'What is it? I am not like you. I do not offer blank cheques.'

'Let us be taken holding hands. Just now, when I promised to amend, you flashed out with such a smile, and took my hand and said, "That is right!" It sent a rush of blood to my heart, and I felt as if I had conquered the world. Let us be taken together, holding hands over the snail, and then I shall be nerved to keep my resolution. If disposed to break it, I shall look on the picture and blush.'

'I consent. Promise me,' said Joanna, looking down and speaking slowly, 'that you will not be angry with me whatever you may hear to-morrow. If you are in trouble yourself, do not doubt but that I also shall have to go through humiliation before I can get the money.'

'From whom will you get it?'

'Never mind.'

'But I do mind. You won't do anything wrong, Joe, even for me?'

'For the snail, you mean.'

'I should never forgive myself if you got into trouble. I do respect you. There is not another girl in the world I think of or care for as you.'

CHAPTER XL.

CHEEK SENIOR.

CHARLES CHEEK was on his way to town next day in an express second-class smoking carriage of the Great Western Railway. He would have gone first, but his funds would not allow the extravagance. At the Kingsbridge Road station the door of the carriage was opened, and an elderly gentleman dashed in, drawing after him his portmanteau, then signalling through the window when the train was in motion that he had forgotten his bundle of rugs and umbrella on the platform. A porter picked them up, ran after the train, and thrust them through the window, knocking the cigar out of Charles Cheek's mouth and inflicting a dent on his hat.

'Very sorry, upon my word,' said the owner of the articles. 'When travelling one is liable to lose one's goods.'

'Seeing that you have but your head, portmanteau, and bundle of rugs, the exertion of recollecting them cannot be excessive.'

'I never travel if I can help it,' said the other. 'I had just time to throw a shilling to the porter, but as I was agitated I don't know where it went and whether he saw it. Perhaps it fell under the rails and is flattened. When I am hot and flurried my sight fails me and my hand shakes. It does not matter. I will give the man another shilling on my return. Lord bless me! I have got into a smoking carriage. Never mind, I do smoke—for once in my life I am lucky. May this be an omen that my journey will be prosperous! Sometimes I have got into a first class when I had a second-class ticket, and then had to pay the difference. Sometimes I have tumbled into a third class when I had paid fare by second, but the company never refunded. Why, bless my heart! Surely I know your face; you are the image of

your sainted mother, and have the Worthivale look about your eyes and mouth—more than has my cross boy Beavis. Surely I am speaking to Mr. Charles Cheek ?'

'That is my name, sir, and have I the honour——'

'Of meeting a relative. Your mother was my first cousin. I hear you have been at Plymouth. It is really too bad that you have never been near us. Only a pleasant cruise to Kingsbridge from Plymouth.'

'You have not invited me, sir. Are you Mr. Worthivale ?'

'The same. Steward to his Grace the Duke of Kingsbridge. We have a nice little place, Court Royal Lodge, and would have been proud to see you in it. I did not invite you ? Bless my soul ! how careless of me ! I have intended to do so, and tied knots in my pocket-handkerchief several times to remind me to write ; but when I came to find the knot I always recollect some omissions in my duty to his Grace, and thought the knot was tied in reference to that. You must excuse my neglect. I am so overwhelmed with business that I have no time to think of private affairs. You may be sure that you would always be welcome at the Lodge.'

'I dare say you have much to occupy you now,' said Charles Cheek. 'There is much talk in Plymouth about the break-up in the Duke's affairs. I hear they are in a very ugly mess.'

'Mess !' exclaimed Mr. Worthivale, bridling ; 'mess is not a word that is seemly in such connection. A duke's affairs may become embroiled, an earl's involved, an ordinary squire's may fall into confusion, but only a tradesman's can get into a mess. There has been agricultural depression felt in the midlands and in the east of England, where much corn is grown, and some of the great landowners have had to retrench, and the smaller have been reduced to difficulties ; but here it is not so. A duke is something very different from a country squire.'

Not a trace of a blush appeared on the steward's face as he told this lie. He was a man of scrupulous integrity, but to save the honour of the house he served he was ready to say anything—who can tell?—even do anything. Mr. Worthivale, who told this falsehood, was actually on his way to town to see the father of Charles Cheek, the wealthy tradesman, and to try to inveigle him into lending money to relieve the distress of the



family. He had written to Crudge, as agent for Mr. Emmanuel, requesting him to call at his house on a certain day. He had written to the other mortgagees, who were anxious and troublesome, to pacify them with words if possible. And the words he had used to them were not strictly true. He was not satisfied that Emmanuel, and Emmanuel alone, would be satisfied with only promises. He had tortured his brains for many nights with schemes for raising money without a sale of property. All at once a brilliant idea flashed into his mind. He recollects Mr. Cheek, of the monokeratic system, who had married his pretty and sweet cousin, a Worthivale. He had not met Cheek since the funeral of Mrs. Cheek, but he knew about him and his son from the correspondence of relatives. He had not taken a liking to Mr. Cheek, who was a man of modern ideas, without patience with Conservatives and Churchmen, and held advanced ideas about the land laws and the extension of the franchise, and cried out for Disestablishment and the abolition of the House of Lords. Mr. Worthivale had heard also of young Charles, a careless, extravagant dog, who gave his father much trouble. Mr. Cheek had wished his son to enter the business, and had forced him, when he left school, to occupy a stool in the office, but Charles in an hour threw the accounts into such confusion that it took his father days to unravel them; and although he was tried in various departments of the establishment, he proved such a failure in all that his father was fain to let him go his own way. Charles had desired to enter the army, but Mr. Cheek would not hear of this, and battled against his son's inclination till the young man was past the age at which he could obtain a commission. Then only did he admit to himself that he had made a mistake. In the army Charles would have had a profession and something to occupy him, and he seemed fit for no other profession, and to care for no other occupation. The father proposed that he should read for the Bar, but the disinclination of Charles for legal studies soon manifested itself. For medicine he was too thoughtless, and Mr. Cheek was forced to let him live as an idler. The father had been so accustomed to work, and to associate work with the first duty of man, even though that work was to throw dust in the eyes of the public, that it was with the utmost reluctance that he consented to find Charles an income of four hundred a year, and to let him live as he liked, associating with officers, losing money to them, entertaining them, and being laughed at

by them behind his back. Charles had got into trouble several times, and his father had paid his debts, each time with angry reproaches and threats of disinheritance.

Worthivale had heard that the elder Cheek had amassed a large fortune, which his son's extravagance might impair but could not exhaust. He had taken it into his head that nothing would be easier for him than to persuade old Mr. Cheek to lend the necessary thousands for the saving of the Duke. This was the new web of fancy spun by his hopes, attached to no probabilities, floating in his brain like the gossamer of autumn ; and in this vain hope he was on his way to town.

'I am going to drop in on your father,' said Mr. Worthivale. 'I cannot think of going to town without looking him up. It is many years since we met, and when we get old we cling to old acquaintances. Are you going directly home ? If so, tell him I shall turn up.'

'Oh no ! I shall put up at an hotel. I am not so keen after the shelter of the paternal wing.'

'I rather want to see your father this evening. I have so much business to occupy my day that I can ill spare other time. Am I likely to find him at home of an evening ?'

'Sure to catch him. He never goes to the theatre or concerts. You could not wring five words out of him during business hours. I shall not drop in on him to-morrow till after the Monokeros has drawn in his horn.'

'If that be so,' said the steward, 'I will take a cab after I have had my dinner and go to him. It is as well that we should not be there together ; he and I will like to have a chat over old times —times before you were born.'

Accordingly, on reaching town, Mr. Worthivale drove to his inn, ordered a simple dinner, and when he had done, took a hansom to his destination.

Mr. Cheek had just dined, and was lingering over his glass of wine when the steward was announced. He told the servant to show Mr. Worthivale in to him in the dining-room. This was a large apartment with a red flock paper on the walls, and a Turkey carpet on the floor. The furniture was of heavy mahogany, polished, his chairs covered with red leather. The window-curtains were of red rep. Against the walls hung some large engravings —Landseer's dog looking out of a kennel, the Newfoundland lying on a quay, Bolton Abbey in the olden time—pictures every

one has seen and knows as he knows the airs of ‘*Trovatore*’ and the taste of peppermint.

Over the fireplace was a looking-glass; on the table were oranges, almonds, raisins, and mixed biscuits. Everything was in the room that was to be expected; nothing there that was unexpected. Tottenham Court Road had furnished it. A man’s room reflects his mind. Everything there was solid, sound, and commonplace.

Mr. Worthivale had no time to look round him. He ran forward and effusively shook hands with Mr. Cheek, who rose ceremoniously, and received his greeting without great cordiality, but with civility.

‘Take a chair, Worthivale; glad to see you. Have port or sherry? If you prefer claret I will have some decanted. Don’t drink it myself. Take an orange or—raisins. I will ring and have some more almonds brought in. I have eaten most. Take some biscuits; you will find a ratafia here and there under the others. I have eaten those on the top. I hope you are well. I have not seen you for twelve years and a half.’

‘So much as that? You do not say so!’

‘You have not visited me since my wife’s death.’

‘I may retort on you. I live in the country. You Londoners need a holiday. Why have you not fled the fogs and smoke, and come to me for sea air and the landscape of South Devon?’

‘I never take a holiday. Can’t afford it. Work always goes on, and always needs my presence. When the Londoners leave town, the country folk come up, and purchase for the ensuing year.’

Mr. Cheek was a heavily built man, with a long head and face, the latter flat, with a nose sticking out of it, much as the Peak of Teneriffe pokes out of the sea—led up to by no subsidiary elevations, abrupt, an afterthought. His eyebrows were black, but his hair was grey, and disposed to retreat from the temples, which were highly polished. He wore a grey thick Newgate collar, a black frock coat, black trousers, black waistcoat relieved by a heavy gold chain, a good deal of white shirt front, turned-down collars, necessitated by the Newgate fringe, and a black tie. He always smelt of black dye, for his cloth clothes were always new and glossy and uncreased. He had a trick of stretching his arms with a jerk forward at intervals, exposing much cuff, acquired from wearing new coats that were not easy under the arm. His

eyes were dark and penetrating, his lips firm. From his nostrils two very dark creases descended to the corners of his mouth, like gashes in which lay black blood. The old man seemed very lonely in his dining-room, without a companion with whom to exchange ideas, and only a choice between almonds and raisins, ratafia, and macaroons, but he did not seem to feel it ; as he ate and drank he schemed fresh plans for making money, and that was his delight. A companion would have discussed less profitable and interesting topics.

Worthivale spent an hour with old Cheek, telling him about himself, his position at Court Royal, the splendour of the Kingsbridge family, the virtues of the Duke, and Lord Ronald and the Marquis, and the unapproachable charms of Lady Grace.

The steward went on to talk about the estates, the prospect of making a second Torquay out of Bigbury Bay, of the chance of converting the creek of Kingsbridge into a harbour, of the building stone on the estates, of the shale from which petroleum might be extracted, of the slate quarries that only needed opening out and connecting with the sea by a line to supply and roof in the whole south coast of England.

Mr. Cheek had listened with indifference to the enumeration of the merits of the members of the noble house, but when the steward touched on speculative ventures his interest was excited. He ate all the almonds off the raisin dish as fast as he could chew them, and then rang to have the dish replenished.

Mr. Worthivale hinted that his Grace was in need of temporary accommodation, owing to the extravagance of his ancestors and the calling up of some of the mortgages, and he suggested that a better and safer investment for floating capital could not be found.

Mr. Cheek listened with close attention, but said nothing. Such investments apparently possessed no attraction for him. The steward, with all his eloquence, had made no way.

Nevertheless, Worthivale did not abandon hope. The wealthy tradesman had not disputed the feasibility of his schemes, had not said, in so many words, that he would have nothing to do with the mortgages.

Then the conversation drifted to young Charles. Mr. Worthivale said that he had come to town with him.

'I know what he wants—money,' said the father, with imperturbable countenance. 'Never made a penny himself.'

'I am afraid he gives you a good deal of trouble,' said the steward.

'Fine fellow,' answered old Cheek. 'Good looks. Ready address. A figure. No Devonshire twang. Can't get the R's and the U's right myself. Never shall. Gräss is long gräss with me, never cropped gräss.'

'Charles is a very pleasant-looking fellow,' said Mr. Worthivale, 'the image of his dear mother.'

'Mentally, morally, physically,' acquiesced the trader; 'can't expect every man to take to business.'

'No,' said Mr. Worthivale; 'it is born in some, not in others, like an ear for music, a taste for sport, and a hand for carving a goose.'

'Suppose so,' said Mr. Cheek.

'It takes two generations to make a gentleman,' reasoned Mr. Worthivale, 'and even then—there always remains lurking in the system a *je-ne-sais-quoi*.'

'A what?' exclaimed Mr. Cheek, looking frightened. 'Is it in the skin?'

'Only a French expression,' exclaimed the steward.

'Never understood other than one foreign word, and that—monokeratic, for which I paid five guineas,' said Mr. Cheek. 'I wanted a suitable word, I went to an Oxford scholar, and said, find me the word, and I'll find you a five-pound note and five shillings. That's how I came by it.'

Neither spoke. The steward was peeling an orange. Presently Mr. Cheek began to move uneasily in his chair, to swell and puff. Then out came a confidence. 'Charles is a trouble to me. I fill the barrel, and when I'm gone he'll turn the tap and let it run. No fortune can stand a running tap. I wish I knew how to cure him. This consciousness takes the taste out of my profits. It is like eating bread from which the salt is omitted in the making.'

'Take my advice,' said Worthivale; 'mix him in good society. He hangs about a garrison town for the sake of the officers, but he never associates with the better class of officers, only with those who like his dinners, and bleed him at billiards. He never sees the ladies, and it is ladies who humanise, civilise, and refine.'

'Can't do it. I'm not in society myself. Shop stands in the way.'

'I wish I could persuade him to come to Court Royal Lodge,

and pay me a long visit. I could introduce him to people of the first quality, and show him something better than gambling officers and fast ladies. You will never do anything with him, Cheek, till you have put him in a situation where his better qualities may be drawn out, and he may learn to blush at his weaknesses.'

'If he were up here in town,' said the father, scratching his nose meditatively with a stalk of raisins, 'it might be done—by paying. Some quality people do come to my shop. They don't put on their best bonnets and come in their own carriages when they do, but I know 'em. A long bill might be forgiven some lady of rank and fashion if she would invite Charles to dinner or a dance—such things are done—just to give him the chance of putting his foot into high society. If he were once in, Charlie could maintain himself there. Society would want him when it had seen him. I wouldn't mind paying, but it can't be done. Charlie cares only for officers, and is either at Portsmouth or Plymouth, befooled by them out of his—my money.'

'Send him to me.'

'I don't suppose he would care for the country. Nothing to be done there.'

'He can see the magnificent grounds. He can boat. He can shoot.'

'Grounds anywhere. Mount Edgecumbe open to public on Wednesdays. Boating to be had at Plymouth. This is not the time of year for shooting.'

'True. Let him come to me in the shooting season.'

'Many months to that. Meantime he may have gone to the bad.'

'I invited him to-day to visit me, and he did not decline.'

'Too much of a gent for that,' said the father. 'Mischief is he can't say Nay. He will promise you a call, and never go. I know him. He promises reform every time he comes for money, but never reforms.'

'He is entangled in a social stratum—a sort of Bohemianism, that will not allow him to reform. Get him out of that, and he will be another man. My Beavis never gives me an hour's concern, because he associates with the family at Court Royal. The Marquis loves him as a brother. Beavis would do your boy an infinity of good. Beavis is a fine, strong-willed, honourable fellow, with a tender heart and a true conscience.'

'Charlie, also, is a fine fellow,' said old Cheek, who could not endure to have another young man contrasted favourably with his own son. 'The mischief is, I was too busy all my days, and could not see enough of him. Only wants his chance now.'

'Well,' said Worthivale, standing up, 'I must be off now. Good-bye, Cheek. It is a real pleasure to me to meet you again.'

'Dine with me the day after to-morrow. Seven punctually.'
'I shall be delighted.'

He left the old man sitting looking before him at the dish of biscuits from which he had exterminated the ratafias. Every now and then he turned over the biscuits with his finger, but his mind was not on the ratafias. He shook his long head at intervals, and said, 'If that were to happen—if Charlie were to be so weak as that—and he can't say No—least of all to a woman—he would be done for irretrievably.'

(*To be continued.*)



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